

<https://helda.helsinki.fi>

Ordinary Heroes and Heroines? : Fictional Stories of Tibetans and Life in the Countryside in the gTsang and A mdo Regions

Virtanen, Riika J.

2018

Virtanen , R J 2018 , ' Ordinary Heroes and Heroines? Fictional Stories of Tibetans and Life in the Countryside in the gTsang and A mdo Regions ' , Himalayan Discoveries : an interdisciplinary journal on Himalayan studies , vol. 2 , no. 1 , pp. 59-94 .

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/272993>

unspecified
publishedVersion

Downloaded from Helda, University of Helsinki institutional repository.

This is an electronic reprint of the original article.

This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.

Please cite the original version.

Ordinary Heroes and Heroines? Fictional Stories of Tibetans and Life in the Countryside in the gTsang and A mdo Regions

Riika J. Virtanen

1. Introduction¹

Reading contemporary Tibetan literature it is easy to find several prose works which contain fictional descriptions of life of ordinary Tibetans who live in ordinary Tibetan surroundings. This has not always been the case, as if we think about Tibetan literature, this tendency to depict ordinary people living ordinary lives is a more recent phenomenon which can be noticed in literature produced in the 1980s and after that.² Of course, this is only one of the features typical to modern Tibetan writing; Tibetan modern literary production includes stories of several kinds, such as magical realist writings and other stories containing some fantastic elements and also stories located in time earlier in Tibetan history.³

The development of modern Tibetan literature is usually thought to have started in the 1980s and it brought with it big changes in the nature of the literary works produced.⁴ One important feature of modern Tibetan literature can be viewed to be its largely secular nature if contrasted with a large number of works of traditional Tibetan

¹ This article is part of the article series of my postdoctoral research on characters in Tibetan literature. I wish to thank the Kone Foundation for their support of my postdoctoral research. I also wish to thank the three anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions, which greatly helped me improve this article. I am grateful to Dr. Mark Shackleton for checking the English language of this article. All the remaining mistakes are of course my own.

² For example, several of the stories of Dhondup Gyal (Don grub rgyal) who has been considered the founder of modern Tibetan literature, have characters who could be considered ordinary Tibetan peasants, nomads, villagers, teachers and students and so on. Their everyday life and environments, activities and problems appear in some depictions in the stories, as, for example, it is mentioned that some characters are working in a field in his well-known novella "Sad kyis bcom pa'i me tog" ("A Flower Destroyed by Frost", Don grub rgyal 1997: 234–235). Information on the topics and themes of modern Tibetan stories many of which contain some depictions of ordinary Tibetans and their life and problems, can be found, for example, in A. A. Moon's article series about modern Tibetan literature (1991), in Tsering Shakya's article (2000: 32–39), and Kamila Hladikova's dissertation in a subchapter titled "The Main Themes of Modern Tibetophone Literature" (2013: 122–128).

³ For information on magical realism in Tibetan literature, see, for example, Alice Grünfelder's book about Tashi Dawa and his writings (1999), Franz Xaver Erhard's article (2007) in which he discusses two stories by Jangbu (Ijang bu), Patricia Schiaffini-Vedani's article (2008) about magical realism and some stories of Tashi Dawa (Zhaxi Dawa), and Kamila Hladikova's dissertation in which she also discusses some Tibetan writers and their works with some elements which can be viewed as magical realist (Hladikova 2013: 136–154). For modern Tibetan novels located in earlier times, see Robin 2007.

⁴ Tibetan modern literature has been discussed in several edited volumes and research works. See, for example, Shakya 2000 & 2004, Robin 2009/2010, Hartley and Schiaffini-Vedani 2008, Erhard 2011 and A. A. Moon 1991.

literature which are often in their nature religious or may have some religious colouring in them.⁵ Of course, Tibetans these days still continue to produce writings of a religious nature. However, when speaking about modern Tibetan literature, it normally means the so-called “new writing” (*rtsom rig gsar pa*) that started to appear in the beginning of the 1980s, first largely in various literary magazines published in Tibetan inside the People’s Republic of China. The secular stories of the life of people in Tibetan contemporary society usually have main characters that appear as just ordinary Tibetans. By ‘ordinary’ can be understood people who are not religious personages or practitioners and who are also not royalty or people connected to palaces and power.

In this article I look at characters in two Tibetan novels which contain depictions of ordinary Tibetan people and their lives. The literary works I discuss are Tashi Palden’s (bKra shis dpal ldan, b. 1962) *Phal pa’i khyim tshang gi skyid sdug* (“The Life of an Ordinary Family”) and Tagbum Gyal’s (sTag ’bum rgyal, b. 1966) *lHing ’jags kyi rtsa thang* (“The Silent Grassland”).⁶ They are both well-known writers and authors of many literary works. Tashi Palden is from the gTsang region in Central Tibet and works in a newspaper *Bod ljongs nyin re’i tshags par* (“Tibet Daily”) in Lhasa. He is the author of several prose works and essays and two of his well-known story collections are *rGyud skud steng gi rnam shes* (“Consciousness on Lute Strings”) and *Phyi nyin gyi gnam gshis de ring las legs pa yong nges* (“The Weather Will Be Better Tomorrow than Today”). Tagbum Gyal is from Amdo and works as a teacher in a middle school in the region. He has written several prose works, many of which have been published in various Tibetan language literary magazines and other publications.⁷

Tashi Palden’s *PHKH* was first published in 1992 and then later printed again in 2006 in Lhasa by Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang (“People’s Press of Tibet”).⁸ Considering its year of publication in the beginning of the 1990s, it is a relatively early

⁵ For information on works of several genres of traditional Tibetan literature, see the volume edited by Cabezón and Jackson (1996). When characterizing generally modern Tibetan literature as “secular”, it is here meant that works considered to belong to this type of literature do not usually preach or promote religion. However, some modern Tibetan works may contain some religious elements as religion has such a great influence in Tibetan culture. Françoise Robin has in her recent article (2016) discussed two short stories by two Tibetan writers, Yangtso Kyi (g.Yang mtsho skyid) and Lhajang Gyal (Lha byams rgyal), in which the Buddhist idea of rebirth occurs. However, Robin explains that the theme has been treated with some ambivalence with the possibility of different interpretations (Robin 2016: 124–125).

⁶ Henceforth, *Phal pa’i khyim tshang gi skyid sdug (PHKH)* and *lHing ’jags kyi rtsa thang (LHTS)*.

⁷ The information here about these two writers is based on the information given in two Tibetan language publications, which contain short biographies on these writers: see mTsho sngon bod yig gsar ’gyur khang (ed.) 2006: 36, 489 and Hor gtsang klu rgyal (ed.) 2012: 143, 194. In the former publication there is also an essay by Tagbum Gyal himself about his writing (sTag ’bum rgyal 2006). In the essay he tells e.g. about the great impression reading the stories of *Mi ro rtse sgrung* made on him when he was a child, and how he started to write his own stories in the 1980s inspired by reading the literary magazine *sBrang char*. His first story “mTsho skyes” (“Lake Born”) was published in the literary magazine *Zla zer* in 1984 and was written with Trabha (bKra bha).

⁸ In my discussion I have used the 2nd edition from 2006. The years of publication have here been given as printed in this later edition. In her article, Robin (2009/2010: 33) gives the date of the first edition as 1991.

novel of modern Tibetan literature since at that time few modern novels were written in Tibetan, but the number has steadily grown since those times.⁹ The nature of this novel can be considered pioneering, as it tells about the daily life of Tibetans and the changes in it in contemporary times in a realistic style. It is a lengthy novel of 575 pages and set in a village in the countryside in the gTsang region of Tibet. It is written in a language which could be described as modern literary Tibetan. The other novel, Tagbum Gyal's *LHTS*, is mainly located in a village in the countryside in Amdo.¹⁰ It appeared in 1999 and as stated in the information about the writer and in the publisher's preface, it was the first full-length Tibetan novel published in Amdo (Qinghai).¹¹ The preface also tells that the novel is based on an earlier work by the author titled "rNam shes" ("Consciousness"), which appeared as a serial in the literary magazine *sBrang char* ("Light Rain"), but which has been extended in the novel.¹² In the language of the novel, especially in the dialogue, some influences from the Amdo dialect are noticeable. These two novels have also been discussed to some extent in Western research. Robin mentions them in her survey of Tibetan novels (Robin 2009/2010: 33, 35), setting them in the context of the development of Tibetan novel writing. Shakya discusses the plot of Tashi Palden's novel, its setting in time and some of its main characters (Shakya 2004: 151–174). However, I feel that there is more to discuss in these two works – especially the existing discussion in Western research on Tagbum Gyal's *LHTS* seems to be quite brief considering the novel is a work of several hundred pages.

But how is the normal daily life of people depicted in these two novels? What kind of role do the depictions of characters engaged in their everyday work and tasks have in these works, and do such scenes contribute to an understanding of the nature of the characters? When discussing the characterization of ordinary Tibetans and their daily life, it made good sense to compare these two novels: they are both literary historically important and monumental works of modern Tibetan literature which tell about the lives of Tibetans in Tibetan environments in comparatively recent times in Tibet and in Tibetan areas under the rule of People's Republic of China.

In both novels the main characters live in the countryside in a small village. In Tashi Palden's *PHKH* they live in an agricultural area where fieldwork is an important part of their lives, whereas in Tagbum Gyal's *LHTS* the village is located in a pastoral area (*'brog khul*). It is possible to find scenes related to the working and daily life routines of the characters in both novels, which are written in a style which could be characterized as predominantly realistic.

When examining characters in a novel, the information on their various aspects of appearance, nature, behaviour and growth during the storytime have to be usually gathered from many different scenes in different places of the text. This is a challenging task since the characters are often involved in so many activities, human relations and have different emotional states and thoughts.¹³ However, in this article the attention is

⁹ The first modern Tibetan novel written in Tibetan is considered to have been dPal 'byor's *gTsug g.yu* ("Turquoise Head-Ornament"), published in 1985. It has been discussed by Shakya (2004: 144–150) and Erhard (2011).

¹⁰ Some of its scenes happen in a small town located some distance from the village.

¹¹ See also rNam sras 2006: 506.

¹² *LHTS*, dPe skrun gsal bshad: 1–2. See also rMog Don grub tshe ring 2006: 496.

¹³ James Phelan (1989: ix) has also observed the difficulty of trying to examine characters in isolation and has pointed out the importance of the context of narrative for understanding them.

concentrated on the everyday life of the characters, and thus it is not meant to be a comprehensive discussion of the novels, but mainly provides some information on the representation of everyday life and characters in their everyday tasks. One of the reasons for this choice was to provide readers with some information on everyday life in Tibetan areas as represented through fiction, and scenes involving aspects of the everyday life of Tibetans are an important element in my two chosen texts.

As the tasks and routines characteristic to everyday life are many in these novels, I have chosen to focus on two types of activities: depictions related to working and those related to food preparation and eating and drinking. Activities connected with them can be found in both novels and they are, of course, important elements of everyday life. In Tibetan society, as elsewhere, even if a person does not go to work regularly, most people tend to do some work in their homes such as household chores and other tasks. However, activities related to food and to work are of a somewhat different nature: work often occurs outside the home in work places or in a more public sphere and can be encouraged and idealized by society, as has been done in Communist China.¹⁴ On the other hand, food preparation and eating are activities that have to be done in order to survive and they often happen in the private realm of homes. Thus, discussing the representations of these two activities contributes towards an understanding of the representation of two different aspects of everyday life.

I remember when first reading Tashi Palden's *PHKH*, I wondered why there were so many scenes related to working. Do such depictions contribute significantly to the representation of characters and to the thematic content of the work? Moreover, in what sense can the characters be considered "ordinary" or does it make sense to view these Tibetans as so ordinary after all? Do they represent average Tibetan people living in rural areas? Do the characters share some features with heroes and heroines found in socialist realist style literature, or are they somehow different?¹⁵ Can they be regarded as typical or representative characters (*dpe mtshon mi sna* or *tshab mthson mi sna*), a term often found in Tibetan literary criticism? The idea of a typical character has a Marxist literary critical background, but it appears to have been later applied in a wider sense in Tibetan literary criticism to the idea that even though a character has his/her own unique personality, he/she also has a more general side and thus may represent a larger group of people, issue or phenomenon in society.¹⁶ In his Yen'an talks, Mao expressed views on how literature should serve "the masses" and regarded "the life of the people" as a source of inspiration for literature, which is reflected in the minds of authors of literary works.¹⁷ Can the characters be viewed somehow as representing "the masses" and the everyday depictions as reflecting the life of the common people in the regions the novels are set? This need of literature according to Communist ideology to

¹⁴ The idealization of work by the Communists in China is, for example, demonstrated in the way persons considered exemplary workers were promoted in China, as discussed in Cheung Yin Ki's Ph.D. dissertation (Cheung 2012: 2–4, 12–15). See also Huang (1973: 212), who mentions "the preferential status given to workers" in Communist China.

¹⁵ For information on how heroes tended to be depicted in socialist realist style of writings, see, for example, Mathewson 1958/1975: 221–225, 247–248; Herdan 1992: 96–97.

¹⁶ For reference to a "typical character" in a letter written by Friedrich Engels, see Eagleton & Milne 1996: 39. For Tibetan understandings of typical or representative characters, see, for example, Tsho bzhi shes rab lhun grub 2007, Nyi chung & bKra shis bu lags 2004: 39.

¹⁷ Mao Tse-Tung 1956/1962: 12, 18.

serve the common people could at least partly explain the question why the characters in modern Tibetan literature tend to be ordinary people instead of focusing on some religious or royal personages.

To understand better the characterization in the novels I shall make some use of James Phelan's theory of characters according to which characters have three components: the synthetic, mimetic and thematic (1989: 2–3). These components can be used as tools to discuss the various aspects of characters. In his Introduction to *Reading People, Reading Plots* (1989: 1–23) Phelan has explained the meaning of these components. According to him, the first one, the synthetic component, is used to characterize the artificial aspect of literary characters. Fictional characters are not representations of particular real persons in real life, but imaginary constructs of the writer of a fictional work.¹⁸ The synthetic component is present in the characters in the two novels under discussion since the characters are fictional persons.

When reading a novel we are usually so absorbed in the story that we might temporarily forget that the characters are fictional and they may begin to feel so real to us that we may start to sympathize with them, feel anxious what may happen to them, and so on. In realistic fiction, therefore, characters often do not appear to us as artificial but as very life like, although when we think about it, we usually immediately recognize their fictional nature. This life likeness of characters is connected to Phelan's concept of the mimetic component of characters, which is used to characterize that aspect of characters that they appear to us to be plausible persons that could exist even though they do not (as they are fictional).¹⁹ The mimetic component may include such features of a character as, for example, his/her name, appearance, way of acting, talking and thinking, nature and personality. Brian Richardson has discussed Phelan's and Rabinovitz's views on the three components of character pointing out some needs for modification and extension of the theory. His observation on how in fictional works it is difficult to find truly realistic characters should be taken into account when discussing the mimetic component of characters.²⁰

The third component proposed by Phelan, the thematic component of a character, refers to the way a character may be used as a vehicle to carry some thematic content of the work: with the help of characters some more general or abstract ideas related to people's life and society can be expressed.²¹ These components may be foregrounded and developed to varying degrees in different characters created by various writers.²² The ideas presented by Phelan about ways of examining the relations between different components and how they may be developed in the course of the narrative²³ are also

¹⁸ See Phelan 1989: 2, 14.

¹⁹ See Phelan 1989: 2, 11, 13.

²⁰ See in Herman et al. 2012 Richardson's part on character (132–137) and his response to other authors of the volume concerning their views on characters (238–240). He has shown a need to add a fourth component, the "intertextual" component and also pointed out the importance of paying more attention to the synthetic component of characters, especially their antimimetic features (Herman et al. 2012: 133–137). Phelan's and Rabinovitz's contribution on characters can be found in the same volume co-authored by several narratologists, see Herman et al. 2012: 111–118.

²¹ See Phelan 1989: 3, 12, 13.

²² See Phelan 1989: 3.

²³ See Phelan 1989: 9, 10, 20, 21.

useful when examining characters in Tibetan literature. Especially, looking at the relation of the mimetic and thematic components of characters can bring some understanding on how the features and functions of characters contribute to the thematic content of the work and especially the depiction of everyday life of Tibetans in the countryside.

2. The Two Stories and Their Main Characters

2.1 Tashi Palden's *Phal pa'i khyim tshang gi skyid sdug* ("The Life of an Ordinary Family")

Tashi Palden's *PHKH* tells about the life of a Tibetan family over three decades sometime between the 1950s and the early 1980s.²⁴ The members of the family are the father, Dhondup (Don grub), and his two daughters and his wife Chime Wangmo ('Chi med dbang mo). His elder daughter Tsheten Lhamo (Tshe brtan lha mo) was born from Dhondup's first marriage to her mother Yangdzom (g.Yang 'dzoms), who died in her early childhood, and the younger daughter Drolma (sGrol ma) was born from Dhondup's second marriage to Chime Wangmo.

The elder daughter, Tsheten Lhamo, can be regarded as the central character in the novel. Her life is depicted from her early childhood up to an age when she is already a married woman who has children and a mature attitude and experience of life. She is from gTsang from a village which in the story is called Lingshong (Gling gshong). She is depicted as obedient to her father since she waits until her father and the groom's parents finally agree about her marriage to a man she loves, Phuntsog (Phun tshogs). After many delays and talks between the parents of both young persons, which demand a lot of tolerance and patience from Tsheten Lhamo, the marriage finally takes place and Phuntsog moves as a groom to the house of Tsheten Lhamo's family. Tsheten Lhamo is depicted as a hardworking and responsible person and a faithful wife. However, her character does not appear to be very open: she mostly does not show her feelings, but rather tries to behave properly, and also her thinking is in one respect depicted as quite conservative: she feels prejudice towards persons coming from the family background of blacksmiths, who were regarded as low in social status in traditional Tibetan society.²⁵

As for the male characters, among the main ones are Tsheten Lhamo's husband Phuntsog, and a man who is from a family of blacksmiths, Lhagdor (Lhag rdor). Phuntsog is depicted as hard-working, honest and a person with some education. On this account, he works as a secretary in the village which is at one stage of the story transformed into a commune. He is depicted as a person who is interested in others' well-being rather than his own career, and his character is so honest and truthful that it

²⁴ The time span from "democratic reforms" (*dmangs gtso'i bcos bsgyur*) to the beginning of the 1980s is mentioned in the publisher's words at the end of the book ("dPe skrun gsal bshad"). Information about the "democratic reforms" in the PRC can be found in Smith's *Tibetan Nation* (1996/1997). According to him, the "reforms" were carried out in Han areas between 1950–53, but in Tibetan areas outside TAR after the mid-1950s and in Central Tibet even later in 1959 and after. Land redistribution was one of the features of the "democratic reforms" (Smith 1996/1997: 387, 391–406, 471–473).

²⁵ For information about occupations and family backgrounds which were considered low in social status in traditional Tibetan society, and how these beliefs may still influence attitudes, see Fjeld 2005: 47–52.

gets him into some trouble. The other main male character, Lhagdor, is attracted towards Tsheten Lhamo, but does not receive any encouragement from her, and then later marries Tsheten Lhamo's younger sister Drolma. Drolma is a more lively character in the story. Her personality is quite different from her elder half-sister: she is very open-minded and does not care about other people's opinions. Without showing any prejudice against Lhagdor's blacksmith family background, she marries him, not listening to any advice from others. Sometimes she is depicted in not so favourable terms: for example, she is not considered skilled in housework, but tries to evade it and even when she receives a chance to go to school for some time, she does not appear to take much interest in studying.²⁶ The relation between Tsheten Lhamo and Drolma and the tensions between them is also one of the important factors in the progression of the novel.

The novel does not appear to be strongly plot-oriented, but instead represents the various aspects of life of the family and events connected with their lives during a longer period of time from times prior to Cultural Revolution and during it up to the time of greater lenience in the early 1980s. The reader can infer from textual hints the time of some events of the story since there are indications of the presence of some policy changes or historical events. These give a realistic touch to the novel – a feeling that people could have lived thus in those times – however, these references to the real world do not make the novel less fictional or more chronicle-like. Dorrit Cohn in *The Distinction of Fiction* (1999) points out how one of the characteristics of fiction is that it is possible for a narrator to describe character's inner feelings and thoughts.²⁷ If we compare Tashi Palden's *PHKH* to a historical presentation, the way in which inner thoughts and emotions of villagers can be depicted in a work of fiction makes it possible for the narrator to tell about people's emotional reactions to their conditions and the changes in their lives. In historical writing the need would arise to present some evidence and sources which are not required in fiction, as discussed by Cohn.²⁸

PHKH gives its readers a picture of the life of Tibetan peasants in the countryside, although it focuses on the life of one particular family which is characterized as *phal pa'i khyim tshang*, an "ordinary family". The way in which the family is characterized as "ordinary" suggests the possibility of understanding the family's lifestyle and standard as shared to a large extent with common folk in that region. Tsering Shakya (2004: 158) has insightfully pointed out how the reference to common people in the title indicates how the novel gives voice to people from ordinary backgrounds. The relatively long period in the life of the family narrated in the novel also makes it possible to understand changes in the lives of the family members and the lifestyle of the villagers in the region. The progression²⁹ is often depicted as evolving around some tensions between the family members and between them and some other characters. The tensions show mainly as quarrelling, which goes so far that the family divides into two units, occupying separate spaces with separate doorways.

²⁶ See *PHKH* 66–67, 89–92, 117.

²⁷ See Cohn 1999/2006: 139–141.

²⁸ For a discussion of the differences between biographical works and fictional works, see Cohn 1999/2006: 29–49; 139–146.

²⁹ Progression is a term used by Phelan (1989: 15) to describe the succession of events in the story. When a literary work is less plot-oriented, it makes sense to use this term instead of the more traditional term 'plot'.

2.2 Tagbum Gyal's *lHing 'jags kyi rtswa thang* ("The Silent Grassland")

Tagbum Gyal's *LHTS* is located in Amdo. Its events take place both in a village named g.Yang lung in the countryside in a pastoralist area and also in a small town some distance from it.³⁰ The novel tells a tragic love story of Wangden Dorje (dBangs ldan rdo rje, in shortened form Wangdor) and Drolma Karmo (sGrol ma dkar mo).

To give an idea of its contents, I shall first give a short summary of some of its events. Wangden Dorje returns to his home region after a long time away and after he has been left by his first wife in Lhasa, where they had been doing business. First he arrives in the small town where his brother Wangdrag (dBang grags) is staying with his family. There he meets Drolma Karmo, a childhood friend, who is a teacher in a school in g.Yang lung, and who has come to town to buy notebooks for the school. They travel back to the village together. Wangden Dorje wishes to open a shop there. He manages to hire a house in the village from Akhu Yangyal (A khu g.Yang rgyal). Akhu Yangyal's son has built the house, but instead of moving there himself, he wishes to continue living in a nomad tent. He also has a daughter, Drolma Tsho (sGrol ma mTsho), a kind-hearted nomad girl who is used to household work and looking after sheep.

Wangden Dorje and Drolma Karmo meet each other on several occasions both in the school area and in Wangden Dorje's shop and they fall in love. However, a young administrative official in town, Kyablo (sKyabs lo), also takes a liking to Drolma Karmo, and other people, including Wangden Dorje's brother Wangdrag (who then does not yet know about the feelings between his younger brother and Drolma Karmo), help in the plans to transfer Drolma Karmo to work in town. They then try to arrange a marriage between Kyablo and her by consulting her father, even though Drolma Karmo herself is against both the transfer and the marriage. This leads to her escape to a hermitage, where some nuns live, to avoid the marriage plan, with Wangdor trying in vain to find her. Thus, their love story becomes a very sad story, as obstacles to their love are created by people who try to arrange marriages for them to persons whom they do not love.

The main characters are both from the region of g.Yang lung. Drolma Karmo is from a pastoralist family, but has attained a proper teacher's education. She is depicted as a devoted teacher and a kind and attractive young woman who, however, has her own willpower which cannot be guided and changed by others, even her parents – she remains faithful to Wangden Dorje, rebelling against their plan to give her in marriage to Kyablo. Wangden Dorje is the adopted son of Ane Cag (A ne lCags), the mother of his elder brother Wangdrag. The novel gives some information about Wangden Dorje's family background: he is a descendant of the chiefs of g.Yang lung, but has lost his parents during the late 1950s when he was still a small baby. Their family background had caused the family problems in those times. His father had been imprisoned and his mother had felt so desperate suffering from public criticism and humiliation that she had taken her own life.³¹ But before her death, she had left her baby, Wangden Dorje, to

³⁰ rNam sras (2006: 506–508) has discussed the contents and themes of Tagbum Gyal's novel in his essay about the writings of Tagbum Gyal.

³¹ *LHTS* 368, 71.

Ane Cag, who since then had taken care of him.³² In the novel, Wangden Dorje is depicted as a person open to new ideas, a person with a generous nature, but someone who sometimes turns to drink for consolation. Although some persons try to suggest that it would be good if he got married to Akhu Yangyal's daughter Drolma Tsho, he does not listen to any such advice, but remains faithful in his heart to his beloved Drolma Karmo.

The progression of *LHTS* centres on the development of the relation between Drolma Karmo and Wangden Dorje and a kind of triangular structure between a woman and two men when another man, Kyablo, takes an interest in her, too. However, this long novel – 586 pages in all – also contains plenty of depictions of activities (of both its main characters and also several side characters) which sometimes may not seem particularly important to the development of the main theme, but contribute to giving an idea of people's life and the developments in the countryside. The time span of the first 14 chapters of the novel is much shorter than in *PHKH*. The main events happen during a relatively short period of about a year or so, apparently in the mid-1980s. There are also some flashbacks providing information about Wangden Dorje's past and thus widening the time span of the novel considerably. The novel has a 15th chapter, named "Afterword",³³ which tells about Wangden Dorje's life later in 1994, about 8 years after the end of the main part of the narrative, and also about the changes that have happened in his life and in the village.

3. Fictional Representations of Everyday Life Tasks and Routines

3.1 Characters in Work

The lifestyle of the family in Tashi Palden's *PHKH* ("The Life of an Ordinary Family") can be described as that of agropastoralists (*sa ma 'brog*) since the members of Tsheten Lhamo's family do both field work and take care of cattle. The novel contains scenes which have depictions of people working in the fields, as well as depictions of characters taking care of livestock, especially herding sheep. There are also several scenes of characters on their way to perform some work and/or returning from some work which gives them the opportunity to engage in discussions with each other. Therefore, such scenes have an important function in the development of the progression of the narrative.

In the other novel, Tagbum Gyal's *LHTS* ("The Silent Grassland"), the village where the main characters Wangden Dorje and Drolma Karmo stay, is located in a pastoralist area where people take care of animals, especially sheep. The main hero, Wangden Dorje, and heroine, Drolma Karmo, are doing business and teaching work, respectively. Thus their main professional activities are not connected with traditional pastoralism, but rather reflect developments in society. The way in which business is mentioned or described in several places of the novel apparently realistically depicts the real life situation in Amdo in those days in the 1980s and 1990s, when possibilities were opening up for trade.³⁴ Wangden Dorje also makes a plan to cultivate the fields. However, later, in the afterword, it becomes clear that the fields, which have been

³² See *LHTS* 57, 69–72, 366–371.

³³ Chpt. 15, "mJug gi gnam" *LHTS*: 557–586.

³⁴ For information on the economic policy of the Chinese Communist Party at that time and economic liberalization in Tibet (TAR) in the 1980s, see Smith 1996: 563, 586–595.

cultivated with success, have to be turned again to grassland for environmental reasons.³⁵ At the end of the novel, Wangden Dorje is selected as a village leader (*sde dpon*) and also becomes manager of a kind of corporation connected with agricultural and pastoralist production (*zing phyugs bzo tshong gsar spel kung zi*) and he takes an interest in modernizing pastoralist activities.³⁶

In Tashi Palden's *PHKH* the life of the peasants is represented as full of work and daily chores. There are several scenes where the way in which the characters are engaged in some work or everyday routine is depicted in careful detail so that readers may picture in their imagination how the characters are working. The mimetic components of the characters in these scenes are often developed well by telling about their appearance, speech and behaviour. Tsering Shakya (2004: 162) has pointed out how attention is given to details in this novel and explains it as aiming for authenticity through writing in a realistic style. The rich detail given to agricultural and other work stresses their importance in the villagers' life. Working is the means of survival, and although a romantic theme is present, the novel primarily focuses on representing the pragmatic everyday tasks and life of the villagers.

If we consider the situation of writing in the PRC, where art may well be influenced by political guidelines and norms,³⁷ the choice to include depictions of characters engaged in various kinds of works and tasks can also be viewed to accord with some Communist ideas connected with literature. These kind of ideas had already been expressed in Mao's Yanan talks. These include the need of literature to reflect the life of people and also the need of writers to write for the masses³⁸ – it could be interpreted that writing about the lives of common people would be of interest to them.³⁹ However, to give attention to the special Tibetan nature of this novel, it is important to notice that in Tashi Palden's novel the characters engaged in work are Tibetans, and the work scenes represent an important aspect of the daily life of Tibetan villagers. Therefore, if one would like to connect this work somehow with the idea of "serving the masses" it would need to be interpreted in a Tibetan context. Tashi Palden himself has written about his wish to serve Tibetan readers with his writings and the importance of writing in Tibetan in his essay about his writings published in *Nags klong khu byug 'du gnas* ("The Forest Abode of Cuckoos").⁴⁰ One important reason why there are so many

³⁵ *LHTS*: 545–556, 560, 571–582.

³⁶ *LHTS*: 561, 579–581.

³⁷ For discussion on literary norms and guidelines in China after the Communist came into power, see, for example, Hong 1999: 17–40. For information on how political issues might influence Tibetan literature in the PRC, see Schiaffini-Vedani 2008: 216.

³⁸ See Mao Tse-Tung 1956/1962: 12, 18.

³⁹ For a discussion about Mao's views on literature, see Hong 1999: 12–17. Hong mentions how Mao's literary thought also included the idea that "... writers must primarily write about the life of workers, farmers, and soldiers, placing emphasis on the formation of advanced literary characters and heroic models..." (Hong 1999: 15).

⁴⁰ See bKra shis dpal ldan 2006: 37–38. The book in which his essay was published was edited by mTsho sngon bod yig gsar 'gyur khang (Qinghai Tibetan News House) and published by the Nationalities Press in Beijing in 2006. It is an excellent source for information about contemporary Tibetan writers and their works containing short biographies of several writers as well as essays related to their writing by the writers themselves and others. Tashi Palden's essay in the collection is titled "bDag dang bdag gi las skal dman pa'i mi sna dang skad yig" ("Me and my unprivileged characters and language").

scenes of work present in the novel could be the demands of realism: representing the lifestyle of peasants as truthfully to the realities of peasant life as possible.⁴¹

Next we shall take a look at two scenes in which the main character Tsheten Lhamo is depicted working in Tashi Palden's novel. A scene in chapter 1 depicts women working in the field in summer. They are dressed in traditional Tibetan *chubas*⁴² and blouses with the hems of their aprons hitched up under their belts while working. In weeding the field they make skilful use of pickaxes and their hands are depicted realistically.⁴³ This novel has been discussed by the Tibetan critic Namse (rNam sras) in his book about modern Tibetan novels. He quotes an excerpt from this scene about village women working in the field and pays attention to the realistic nature of the depiction of working women. According to him, the text "can give the feeling resembling that of really arriving in a village on the high plateau in summer".⁴⁴

After depicting women working in the field, the narrator focuses on one of the main characters, Tsheten Lhamo, and her friend Dzomkyi ('Dzoms skyid), working in the field. This is how Tsheten Lhamo is depicted:

Tsheten Lhamo was wearing a white blouse which had two patches and she had folded on her head a blue striped towel which she had bound together with her hair braids. With her hands she was very skilfully making the earth soft and at the same time without giving mercy to even one weed either picking them up or crushing them (on the spot).⁴⁵

The passage supplies information about Tsheten Lhamo's dress and hair style and then depicts her style of very efficiently weeding the field. Thus, a picture of a Tibetan woman dressed in traditional Tibetan style working with her back bent in a field emerges in the mind of the reader. These descriptions contribute to the mimetic component of her character, describing her appearance and way of working skilfully and efficiently. Depicting a character at work can also be interpreted as having a thematic component: it contributes to the theme of depicting the life of peasants in which work appears as one of the major constituents. The way in which mimetic traits can contribute to thematic component of characters has been described by Phelan and Rabinowitz (2012: 113), who write: "One typical underlying constructive purpose of mimetic characters is to link their mimetic traits with thematic functions." In his *Reading People, Reading Plots* Phelan makes a distinction between the dimensions and functions of the three components of characters. According to him, dimensions are the

⁴¹ There appears to be a correspondence with the real-life situation of peasants in Tibet judging from the information presented by Emily Yeh (2013: 88) about the life of villagers in Kyichuling during the 1960s and the time of the communes, which according to her was described by peasants as a period characterized by very hard labour.

⁴² *Chuba* (*phyu pa*) is the word used for traditional Tibetan dress for both men and women. However, the women's *chubas* look different than the men's. In Central Tibet, where this novel is set, women wear long skirt-like *chubas*, which often do not have sleeves, but a traditional blouse ('og 'jug) is worn under them. A woman's *chuba* may also have sleeves.

⁴³ See PHKH: 10.

⁴⁴ rNam sras 2005: 168–169.

⁴⁵ PHKH: 10: *tshe brtan lha mos 'og 'jug dkar gtsang lhan pa re gnyis phog pa zhis gyon pa dang mgo bor a cor sngo khra zhis nyis lteb brgyab nas lteb gyon byas yod pa skra gzhug gis bsdams/ lag pa gnyis kyis ha cang bde lcag 'khyug pos sa sob sob bzo ba dang dus mtshungs rtsa ngan gcig kyang thar par mi gdong bar yang na 'thog pa dang yang na bsnyal nas bzhas*

attributes of character that may be isolated when thinking about the character, but the functions of attributes develop in the course of progression.⁴⁶ When the reader progresses in reading Tashi Palden's novel, and notices more depictions of characters at work, the gradually accumulating depictions of work take on a thematic function, also indicating the existence of a related thematic component of characters and the thematic dimension in the scenes representing people at work. Considering the rich mimetic details in the depictions in Tashi Palden's novel, it seems to agree with Phelan's observation that:

In works that strive to give characters a strong overt mimetic function, thematic functions develop from thematic dimensions as character's traits and actions also demonstrate, usually implicitly, some proposition or propositions about the class of people or the dramatized ideas (Phelan 1989: 13).

In Tashi Palden's novel the depictions of characters at work and performing various tasks help to convey the idea of the villagers as hard-working people and their normal life being filled with work. In this novel the characters can be said to have "a strong overt mimetic function" on account of the pains taken to realistically represent their working on and performing various tasks.

The above scene containing a depiction of Tsheten Lhamo doing field work has another thematic component: the working situation helps to develop the relation between her and her future husband Phuntsog. The field work gives Tsheten Lhamo and her friend Dzomkyi a chance to see and talk with each other. The ensuing dialogue is very significant for Tsheten Lhamo since Dzomkyi gives her a ring sent by Phuntsog and Tsheten Lhamo understands that their feelings towards each other are similar. Even when they are speaking, Dzomkyi continues weeding. Thus in this scene the way in which the women are working together gives them an opportunity to speak and convey important messages to each other. The social-communicative function of this scene works towards developing the progression and thematic content of the story.

When the characters are not working in the fields or taking care of the livestock, they are often depicted in *PHKH* in the middle of some household chores. Tsheten Lhamo is represented as good at household tasks and diligent in her various tasks inside and outside the house, which include taking care of the animals, fetching water, working in the fields and weaving woollen cloth. These situations also provide the writer with an opportunity to develop the progression of the story in addition to being mimetic depictions of a character performing household chores.

Chapter five contains a scene in which Tsheten Lhamo carries out her daily tasks. She has been faithfully waiting for Phuntsog's return from his studies in Lhasa. When he finally returns to the village he has a young woman with him. Rumours start to spread and Tsheten Lhamo feels deeply sad thinking that Phuntsog has brought his new wife with him. The morning after she has heard the news, she is depicted as going to fetch water from a stream:

Since the happenings of yesterday were vividly present in Tsheten Lhamo's mind, she had not slept well last night. This morning, too, it was as if yesterday's happenings were pressing upon her neck. But since there was the need to take care of one's livelihood and

⁴⁶ Phelan 1989: 9–10.

live one's life in the same way as before, she had risen in the morning slightly later than usual, carried a water container on her back and went to fetch water, not paying attention to any person passing her in either direction. At that time these people were as though each was more in a hurry than the other, and each having work to do which was more important than the others', they just nodded their heads slightly and did not have time to talk, walking by with quick steps. Some people exchanged glances with each other when they saw Tsheten Lhamo, and they looked at her from behind as if something were visible from Tsheten Lhamo's body. To Tsheten Lhamo's mind these people appeared to be distant and unfamiliar. She also did not wish to take the initiative in talking to these people and as there was nothing strange about Pedzom (Pad 'dzoms) always crying, and thinking that they would not act so after a couple of days, she consoled herself. In the same rhythm as the steps of those people carrying water containers was heard the sound "tub tub tub" coming from the water containers as if they were competing with each other.⁴⁷

The passage also contributes to an understanding of Tsheten Lhamo's nature. Although she is tormented by the thought of having lost her beloved to another woman – an idea which luckily for her is soon shown to be mistaken – she acts in a controlled and patient way, so that the morning after she had heard the devastating rumours, she is able to perform her daily routines appearing almost as if nothing has happened although of course she is suffering inside. Although this depiction functions mimetically, it also has a thematic function: it contributes both to an understanding that a peasant's life is filled with daily chores and also contributes to the theme of love, conveying Tsheten Lhamo's feelings and her emotional suffering due to her love.

The descriptions of the everyday duties and tasks of the characters can in some sense be considered to contribute to the "ordinary" nature of characters. Tsheten Lhamo and other village women are engaged in the same kind of household chores and tasks in the field and take care of the households of their families. Thus, in this sense, Tsheten Lhamo appears to be just an "ordinary" peasant woman among other women in the village.

The realistic style of the novel and the way in which the characters are depicted makes them appear so life-like that their synthetic component remains in the background. Tashi Palden himself comments in an essay (2006) that he had heard from someone that his book was among the two most borrowed books in a village cultural

⁴⁷ PHKH 238–239: *kha sa'i gnas tshul tshe brtan lha mo'i sems su gsal po nges yod pas mdang dgong gnyid skyid po ma byung ba dang da nangs kyang kha sa'i gnas tshul gyis rang gi mjing pa nas mnan pa ltar yod mod 'tsho ba dang mi tshe ni sngar bzhin skyel dgos pas mos zhogs pa dus rgyun las phyi tsam langs rjes chu zom rgyab tu khyer te phar tshur 'gro mkhan mi su zhig la'ang do snang mi byed par chu len du 'gro skabs mi de dag ni gcig las gcig brel ba che ba dang/ gcig las gcig las ka gal che ba yod pa ltar mgo bo cog tsam re byed pa las skad cha shod khom kyang med par gom stabs mgyogs po spos nas 'gro bzhin yod/ mi kha shas kyis tshe brtan lha mo mihong skabs phan tshun mig rda brje res byed pa dang/ yang tshe brtan lha mo'i lus las ci zhig ngon rgyu yod pa ltar mo'i rgyab log nas yud tsam re lta bas tshe brtan lha mo'i sems nang gi mi de dag ni de 'dra'i rgyang ring ba dang rgyus mnga' med pa lta bu'i snang ba byung/ mo yang mi de tshor phar skad cha shod mi 'dod la pad 'dzoms rtag par ngu bar rnam rtog med pas nyin shas song rjes mi de tshos kyang de ltar mi byed snyam ste rang gis rang la sems gso byas/ chu zom khyer ba'i mi de dag gi gom stabs dang bstun nas chu zom las "tub tub tub" ces pa'i sgra phan tshun 'gran pa ltar snang/*

house in 'Phyong rgyas and that the villagers had been wondering whether he had visited their village, so real had the descriptions of village life appeared to them.⁴⁸

This kind of realistic feeling can also be experienced when reading Tagbum Gyal's *LHTS*, in which the synthetic component of characters remains in the background. As pointed out by Phelan and Rabinowitz, this kind of situation is typical in that "The mimetic and synthetic components are often (though not always) on a seesaw."⁴⁹ In Tashi Palden's *PHKH* the reader is likely to pay more attention to the mimetic component of characters depicted in lively detail than their artificial, fictional nature. Characters engaged in fieldwork or taking care of animals may give a Tibetan reader from the countryside the feeling that the characters are just living and working in the same style as they themselves and thus a sense of ordinariness can be felt.⁵⁰ Tashi Palden has himself mentioned in his essay in order to produce creative writing that one has to "research continually about life" (*rgyun du 'tsho ba'i nang zab 'jug byed dgos pa*).⁵¹

However, even though a Tibetan reader might feel familiar with the life of the villagers in the novel, there are also significant changes related to the work of the villagers taking place through the time span of several decades. The characters are depicted as living in the middle of changes taking place which they just have to participate in and somehow adjust to. They are not depicted as active agents of change but, rather, directions come from "above" and they have to act accordingly. Though the basic tasks of cultivating the fields and taking care of the sheep remain the same, there are changes concerning the organization and units of working: the narrative describes how first the fields and livestock were communalized⁵² apparently sometime before the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, and then again later in the 1980s villagers were encouraged to take responsibility for their own fields, which were once again shared with their families.⁵³ The policy changes which occurred during the period when Tibet

⁴⁸ bKra shis dpal ldan 2006: 38–39. At the moment I do not have any information on how many people in the countryside actually take an interest in reading Tibetan fiction, but the printing information of *Phal pa'i khyim tshang gi skyid sdug* gives some idea of the relatively small number of readers of Tibetan fiction. The number of copies (*par grangs*) is marked as: "1,801 – 4,800". I do not know whether the first number could denote the first edition of 1992 and the second figure the number of copies after the printing of the second edition of 2006. However, the number of readers could be much larger than the number of books, as the books can be borrowed and one copy read by several persons.

⁴⁹ Phelan and Rabinowitz 2012: 113.

⁵⁰ Tsering Shakya has also pointed out how familiar many elements of the novel can feel to Tibetan readers and has observed how the novel is "closely related to the everyday lived experience of the Tibetan people" (Shakya 2004: 157).

⁵¹ bKra shis dpal ldan 2006: 41.

⁵² I did not notice any specific indication of the year of establishing the commune, but this happens some time before the narrator tells how the word referring to the Cultural Revolution (*'byor med gral rim gyi rig gnas gsar brje chen po*) is heard in the village, but how the villagers do not understand its meaning (*PHKH* 164). For information about collectivization, and the establishment of mutual aid teams and communes in the TAR between the years 1962–1966, see Smith 1996/1997: 535–537. Emily Yeh's book (2013) also contains information about communes in Tibet and what life was like in them (Yeh 2013: 85–89).

⁵³ See e.g. *PHKH* 152–153, 502–503. For information about Hu Yaobang's reform programme started in 1980, see Smith 1996/1997: 568–570. There is information on the way

was under the rule of the People's Republic of China are well reflected in Tashi Palden's novel⁵⁴ and the narration and dialogue show their effects on the peasants' lifestyle and living standards through the means of fiction.

If we compare scenes in which work is done by the characters, there are some differences between Tashi Palden's *PHKH* and Tagbum Gyal's *LHTS*: in Tashi Palden's novel the work-related tasks appear to be described in more detail, whereas in *LHTS* they often do not appear to be so central. Rather, the meetings between the two main characters may happen either in Wangden Dorje's shop or in the school area where Drolma Karmo teaches. As Tagbum Gyal's novel centres more on the development of the love relation between the two young persons, there does not appear to be a need to describe the work they do in such careful detail as in Tashi Palden's novel. Instead, it often appears that the milieus of their working places and the school's staff quarters and surroundings simply form a background where their meetings and discussions can take place, and these encounters between the characters are given the main attention.

Drolma Karmo's actual work teaching different subjects to the children in a classroom is not described in detail, but many of her activities related to school work and taking care of her pupils are described. When Wangdor returns to his native village, travelling there with Drolma Karmo, the appearance of the school area and its buildings is first described, followed by how the children in the school area surround them when they arrive there and how they play outside the school.⁵⁵ As for activities related to the school, Drolma Karmo is, for example, described as telling a story to the children after supper and then giving them some exercises to do in the evening.⁵⁶

LHTS contains some scenes which take place in Wangden Dorje's shop. One day, when Wangden Dorje returns to his shop, he sees Drolma Karmo with some school children standing by the door. She is wearing a *chuba* and a new hat and has a long black plait of hair – she is described as “beautiful and attractive”.⁵⁷ This kind of description of her appearance contributes to the development of the mimetic component of her character, although the way in which Wangden Dorje experiences “an inexpressible feeling in his mind” when he sees that Drolma Karmo has come to visit his shop,⁵⁸ can be viewed as contributing thematically towards the development of the relation between these two young people. They enter his shop and Wangden Dorje tells that he is returning from seeing the lama of the village:

Wangden Dorje then opened the door of the shop and invited them inside. Drolma Karmo came in first and then the children rushed in.

decollectivization was carried out in Tibet in the village of Kyichuling and two state farms in Yeh 2013. She explains that in Kyichuling the land was still owned by the collective but villagers were given the right to cultivate their own plots of land. In state farms the workers had to pay rent for their plot of land (Yeh 2013: 89–90).

⁵⁴ Tsering Shakya (2004: 161) has in his discussion of the novel divided its time into “four eras” which according to him correspond to the following times of history: “(1) Democratic Reform (1960); the Cultural Revolution (1967); the Death of Mao (1976); (4) the Liberalization period under Deng Xiaoping (1979)”.

⁵⁵ *LHTS*: 87–98.

⁵⁶ *LHTS*: 103–105.

⁵⁷ *LHTS*: 300. To describe her dress, the narrator uses the word *phyu pa*, which refers to Tibetan traditional type of dress.

⁵⁸ *LHTS*: 300: ... *sems la smra mi shes pa'i tshor ba zhig skyes byung/*.

“What is it? Isn’t it that the lama is saying that you should become a monk?”

Drolma Karmo leaned on the shop desk and smiled. Although she was looking with both eyes at big and small trade items, it could be noticed that her consciousness was directed towards him. The children were completely fascinated by the things inside the glass box, and showing this and that to each other they had been carried to a state of fascination.

“Not at all.” Wangden Dorje then gave some sweets to the children and poured a handful of sweets into Drolma Karmo’s hand and asked “Are you having a free day today?”

Drolma Karmo took the sweets without hesitation and, removing the wrapping paper, said “If it’s not a free day, is it not alright to come?”

“... ..”

Wangden Dorje again felt speechless. For a while he remained staring at her. In that moment his mind was calling her here (to him) with thousands of calls in the same way it had done when he had first met Dekyi. At first he felt that she (Drolma Karmo) was very close and affectionate to him, but then again the words Kyabla had said that day came to his mind and he felt that between himself and her there was probably a distance of tens of thousands of kilometres.⁵⁹

Drolma Karmo buys notebooks and pencils, and since there will soon be a special Children’s Day at the school, she also purchases sweets and playthings for the children. Before exiting, she invites Wangden Dorje to the Children’s Day celebration and the narrator tells how she blushes a little.⁶⁰ The person named Dekyi (bDe skyid) mentioned in the above passage was Wangden Dorje’s first wife, who left him for another man. The reader gets from here some idea about the items that are sold in the shop, but in addition to the somewhat playful conversation which takes place between them, the passage depicts well how they are aware in a silent, special way about the presence of each other and feel drawn towards each other even though Wangden Dorje apparently feels very uncertain about his chances of becoming close with Drolma Karmo. The main thing in the passage appears to be this depiction of the silent feeling of interest and attraction between them. This thematic element of the characters’ mental states and

⁵⁹ *LHTS*: 300–301: *dbang ldan rdo rjes de mur tshong khang gi sgo phye ste kho tsho nang du bsus/ sgrol ma dkar mo sngon la nang du 'ongs pa dang de mur byis pa tsho'ang nang du 'tshangs byung/*

“ci red/ a lags kyis khyod ban de byos zer ba min nam/”

sgrol ma dkar mo tshong sgrom la khen te gdong la 'dzum zhig lang bzhin mig zung gis tshong rdzas phra rags kun la lta bzhin yod na'ang rnam shes kho'i phyogs su gtad yod pa shes thub/ byis pa rnam shel sgrom nang gi dngos por yid shor te phar ston tshur ston byed bzhin ngo tshar ba'i gnas su bskyal 'dug

“ga la yin/” dbang ldan rdo rjes de mur byis pa de dag la ka ra 'ga' re byin pa dang/ sgrol ma dkar mo'i lag tu'ang ka ra spar mo gang blugs te “de ring khyod tshos ngal gsos pa yin nam” zhes dris/

sgrol ma dkar mos 'dzem dogs mi byed par ka ra blangs nas shun pa bshu bzhin “ngal gsos pa min na yong mi rung ngam” zer/

“... ..”

dbang ldan rdo rjer slar yang bshad rgyu med par gyur/ re zhig la hur rer mor bltas nas 'dug dgos byung/ skabs der kho'i sems su sngon chad bde skyid dang thog mar 'phrad pa'i dus dang 'dra bar 'bod sgra stong phrag du mas mo tshur 'bod byed kyin yod/ dang thog kho'i sems la mo ni rang nyid la ha cang snying nye zhing zhe dungs bzhin pa'i snang ba zhig skyes la/ de mur slar yang nyin der skyab los bshad pa'i skad cha dag sems la 'khor pas/ kho dang mo'i bar du phal cher le dbar khri phrag gi bar thag yod pa'i snang ba skyes/

⁶⁰ *LHTS*: 301–302.

interaction contributes to the main love theme of the novel. The description of the appearance of Drolma Karmo, their way of talking and their external behaviour function mimetically, although the way in which Drolma Karmo invites Wangden Dorje to visit the school also contributes thematically towards the development of the progression. Wangden Dorje also feels that some of her words during their encounter are like a riddle and wonders about their meaning,⁶¹ so this somewhat special way in which Drolma Karmo speaks to him can also be viewed as hinting at her interest in him and thus also contributes thematically. When the atmosphere of interest and attraction between the two young persons is depicted in the scene, the thematic dimensions of their characterization are revealed.

The novel also has many descriptions related to depicting the life in the village as well as thematic elements related to modernization and development. However, these often appear to be discussed during the interactions of the main characters with some other characters. For example, the trends of modernization at a material level that the shop makes available to the villagers are shown to the reader when Drolma Karmo's father, Akhu Namlha (A khu gNam lha), visits Wangden Dorje's shop and shows interest in buying a milk-churning machine ('o dkrug 'phrul chas).⁶² In a scene taking place in the shop, Drolma Tsho (sGrol ma mTsho), the daughter of Akhu Yanggyal, the owner of the house where the shop is, visits the shop and during their conversation Wangden Dorje understands that she cannot handle or count money. This makes Wangden Dorje reflect on how often women lack such skills in that pastoral area and how it is usual that women's work includes such tasks as "extracting butter after churning the milk, gathering fire wood and fetching water".⁶³ This kind of observation seems to point towards how important it would be if education was made available for children in the pastoralist areas, underlining the importance of Drolma Karmo's teaching work in the area. One of the tasks of the villagers is to take care of the sheep. Akhu Yanggyal's daughter Drolma Tsho is also mentioned to be working as a shepherdess.⁶⁴ The narrator also tells how the male protagonist Wangden Dorje had taken care of sheep when he was younger, though with unfortunate consequences: he had on one occasion lost many sheep which were then found killed by wolves. This has led to him being criticized in a struggle session.⁶⁵

One possible reason for this way of constructing the plot so that the everyday life in the village and the need for material and educational development is often brought to the reader's attention with scenes with side characters, could be, that when the main characters, Wangden Dorje and Drolma Karmo, are depicted as progressive persons who bring development to the village, there could have been a need to create side characters of villagers who are either less educated, or even suffer from poverty or still think in a traditional or conservative way. Among these side characters are, for example, Yonten (Yon tan), who is depicted as taking an interest in obtaining poverty reduction benefits and Akhu Yanggyal, who wishes to continue living in a tent (instead of staying himself in the new house built by his son Tobden [sTobs ldan], he rents it to Wangden

⁶¹ *LHTS*: 303.

⁶² *LHTS*: 283.

⁶³ *LHTS*: 281–282.

⁶⁴ *LHTS*: 448.

⁶⁵ *LHTS*: 75–76. This is told to have happened in 1975, thus it is located during the years of the Cultural Revolution.

Dorje for his shop) and takes an interest in religious activities such as turning a hand-size mani-wheel, reciting *maṇi*-mantras and making a pilgrimage to Lhasa. He also advises his son to work as a shepherd instead of preparing for exams to higher education when due to illness he failed to take the exams.⁶⁶ Depictions of these kinds of attitudes and interests of some side characters create a contrast with the main characters and it becomes clearer to the reader how important Drolma Karmo's educational work and Wangden Dorje's work in developing the economy of the village is for the life of the villagers. It could be considered that the side characters are more ordinary while the main characters have some exemplary qualities. Describing the life of the villagers helps the reader to understand the context of the activities of the main characters and to underline the significance of their work in the village. Understanding the significance of their work helps to understand the main characters' personalities, too, as they appear as thinking and acting in a way that can be characterized as progressive and also as persons concerned for others' well-being. This strategy of creating progressive main characters and more ordinary villagers is different from Tashi Palden's novel. In *PHKH* the main characters were just some ordinary villagers who were not depicted as different from others except that the main heroine is a half-orphan and therefore has suffered some extra difficulties in her childhood.

The theme of describing life and changes in the pastoralist area is deemed important in Tagbum Gyal's *LHTS* by the Tibetan critic Namse (rNam sras). He also stresses the courage the main characters have when they do not allow others to arrange their marriages, but act according to their own hearts and feelings of love.⁶⁷ According to Robin, the novel "chronicles the conflict between modernity and tradition in the Tibetan grasslands through the story of a herder's family".⁶⁸ Her way of describing the novel is insightful, since the differences between traditional and modern views and attitudes also cause problems in the relations between the main characters. The traditional Tibetan view accepts the idea of arranged marriages and the involvement of others in marriage plans, whereas the modern view favours love marriages. However, as the conflict between tradition and modernity also covers other phenomena in society (also represented in the novel), I felt that the novel can be described as a moving and tragic love story which may move its reader to tears. In my opinion, too, both the themes of life in a pastoralist area and love between two young persons are present, but I felt that the progression is more focused on the developing of the relationship between Drolma Karmo and Wangden Dorje. The theme of life in the pastoralist area appears more in episodes involving other characters that are not that central to the main theme of love. This focusing on the progression makes the work structurally different from *PHKH*, where the theme of life in a village and changes in it seemed more central than the relationships between characters, which appeared to form several other thematic developments inside the novel.

To summarize the discussion above, if we compare scenes which describe work done by the characters, there are some differences: in Tashi Palden's *PHKH* the work-related tasks are often described in more detail, but in Tagbum Gyal's *LHTS*, they do not appear to be so central, but instead the meetings between the two main characters

⁶⁶ See *LHTS*: 497–498; 111, 116–117, 119, 483–484.

⁶⁷ rNam sras 2006: 507–508.

⁶⁸ Robin 2009/2010: 35.

occur either in Wangden Dorje's shop or in the school where Drolma Karmo teaches. However, the latter novel also contains a fairly good amount of description of the everyday life and conditions of the people, but this often comes expressed with the interactions of the main characters with some other less central characters, rather than their communication with each other.

3.2 Representations of Daily Routines: Cooking and Enjoyment of Food and Drink in the Stories

An important part of the everyday routines of people is cooking food, and eating and drinking. Both the novels contain scenes in which the characters are cooking and/or consuming food or drink. It is worth considering whether these kinds of daily routines described in the stories just add a realistic touch to the fictional lives of the characters (as real people would have to eat and drink), or can the preparation and enjoyment of food and drink be viewed as having some other functions?

Tashi Palden's *PHKH* contains scenes where the family members eat together and also scenes where food and drink are offered as hospitality to guests when they arrive at the house. In this novel these kinds of scenes are sometimes depicted in considerable detail. The novel, for example, contains a scene in which Tsheten Lhamo's father asks her to prepare *thugpa* (*bag thug*)⁶⁹ since he wishes to invite grandfather Dawa (Zla ba) and Drolma's mother Chime Wangmo to eat. The description is rich in detail:

First Tsheten Lhamo made a fire in the stove and placed the water for boiling *thugpa* upon it. Then after washing her hands, she made a dough out of wheat flour in a container. After she had prepared the dough she shook her scarf and spread it to one side and with skilful and experienced hands she threw on top of the scarf each tiny piece of dough like water drops dropping....⁷⁰

The description of the preparation of *bag thug* continues by telling how the soup boils and how her father helps in preparation by cleaning raddishes (*la phug*) and adding meat to the soup. While preparing food they talk with each other about the weather and a new problem related to gathering fire wood, namely the difficulty of finding animals to carry the loads.⁷¹ The reason for this problem appears to be that the livestock have become the property of the commune. The description of making *bag thug* is almost so detailed, containing information about the different phases of the process, that the reader could actually make this dish based on it if he/she would like to do so. The details of food preparation give the scene a vivid, realistic touch, but also Tsheten Lhamo's dialogue with her father gives some idea about the time and conditions of living. The passage contains mimetic detail about Tsheten Lhamo's way of doing a household work, but in addition to that this can also contribute thematically, giving some idea how the everyday life of characters is filled with various tasks and how they work and talk at the

⁶⁹ *bag thug* is a kind of *thugpa*, a noodle soup. To prepare it the dough is shaped into small ball-like shapes and then boiled with other ingredients.

⁷⁰ *PHKH*: 210: ... *tshe brtan lha mos sngon la rdza lar me kha gsos nas thug phru bskyon pa dang de nas lag pa gtsang ma bkrus rjes gzhong pa'i nang du gro zhib brdzis/ gro zhib brdzis tshar rjes rang gi mgo ras de rdab tsam gyis zur du btins pa dang bde lcag dod la myong gom che ba'i lag pas bag rdog re re bzhin chu'i thig pa rgyag pa ltar mgo ras kyi steng du g.yug bzhin yod/ ...*

⁷¹ *PHKH* 210–211.

same time. Preparation of food for the family is a different kind of a work than work in the fields: it is a task that generally has to be done at home in each family regardless of the profession, social status and type of daily work its members are engaged in. Therefore it can be considered interesting that preparation of food in this novel is depicted in as much careful detail as doing some other tasks. Thus, it seems that the number of depictions of work in the novel could be viewed as realistic depictions of the lifestyle of peasants (and thus their function would not appear to be to idealize work or workers somehow). There are also scenes in which the characters are enjoying or are offered some food,⁷² but eating is generally not depicted in as much careful detail as the preparation of food in the above scene. Therefore, it seems that special emphasis is given to characters working both inside and outside the home – the hard and energy-consuming part of everyday life.

Tagbum Gyal's *LHTS* also has scenes where the characters arrive at each other's houses and offer tea and food to each other. However, the depictions on how the food/drink is prepared by a character or enjoyed by others appear in several cases to be somewhat less detailed than in the other novel discussed in this article, although some scenes are more detailed than others. For example, near the beginning of the novel there is a scene where Wangdor, after being away for a long time, has returned to the house in a small town where his brother Wangdrag (dBang grags) and his mother and Wangdor's stepmother Ane Cag (A ne lCags) live. Wangdor is served tea and bread by the wife of his brother and then Ane Cag asks her to prepare meat. Drolma Karmo, who is visiting the family at that time, helps her to do it. No more details of the meal are given and the activities related to food preparation and eating remain more in the background as a side matter. The focus of the scene is more on the interaction of people, depicting how Ane Cag is moved to tears when seeing Wangdor after a long time, and how Kyablo talks with Wangdor about trade and business, and also how Wangdor tells his stepmother about his plan to open a shop and do business in their native village in the pastoral area. In the evening outside the house Kyablo tries to express his feelings of attraction to Drolma Karmo, who does not reciprocate.⁷³ The passage introduces characters and thematic elements which will be developed later into the complicated triangular relation between Wangdor, Drolma Karmo and Kyablo and also the thematic element of modernization and development in the form of Wangdor's plans to open a shop. Thus, it appears that the food and drink are a side matter which adds a realistic touch to the scene as it is usual for Tibetans to offer tea and food to people arriving at their homes for a visit. Of course, this is done with special warmth when a family member who has been away for a long time returns home. The important function of the scene is to introduce Wangden Dorje and bring the main characters into the same space in interaction with each other. From the beginning of this novel the thematic components of the characters are developed so that they function towards building the events of the plot.

However, in *LHTS*, too, there are also somewhat more detailed descriptions of eating and preparing food, for example in the scene in which Wangdor, after his arrival at school with Drolma Karmo, enjoys some food there prepared by her and talks with an

⁷² See e.g. *PHKH* 25–26, 176.

⁷³ *LHTS*: 34–41.

old teacher from the school, Akhu Lodroe (A khu Blo gros).⁷⁴ Drink reveals a quality in Wangdor which is not that ideal: after understanding that Drolma Karmo has been transferred to town and that there is a plan to marry her to Kyablo, he drinks so much beer (*chang*) that he gets drunk.⁷⁵ Drinking appears to be a weakness of Wangdor: in his youth he had taken some *chang* (beer) and under its influence had sang a song which was not permitted during those times when during the Cultural Revolution there were restrictions on activities related to Tibetan culture. The fear of serious consequences in an upcoming struggle session meeting had caused Wangdor to leave his native village behind and escape to another region in Amdo.⁷⁶

Another function of the scenes involving descriptions of food and eating in Tashi Palden's *PHKH* appears to be to give an idea of the economic and food situation of the villagers at different points of the story time and the changes happening in the availability of food. This is in a way related to the results of work – the harvest – before and after changes in the organization of agriculture and pastoralist work. From the descriptions in the novel it can be understood that the food situation of the village was better at the beginning of the story before Tsheten Lhamo's marriage, got worse during the Cultural Revolution after the village was made a commune, and then improved again towards the end of the novel. A scene in which a young girl, Pasang (Pa sangs) comes to borrow *tsampa*⁷⁷ at the door of Tsheten Lhamo's house reveals the food situation of some villagers at that time, which is said to be in 1970. Out of compassion, Tsheten Lhamo invites her in and she is given *tsampa*, sugar, cheese and black tea. Pasang wishes to borrow *tsampa* for her brother who has to go and look after the cattle.⁷⁸ From their conversation it becomes clear that her family does not have proper or sufficient food for their needs. Also, the situation with some food items is worse than before in Tsheten Lhamo's and her sister's houses. For example, it appears that there is not enough butter as those members of her family who can tolerate it add oil to their tea instead of butter.⁷⁹ Thus, the little details related to food and drink at different points of the narrative function as indicators of the living standard and conditions of the times in question and how they change when political changes affect the village (or commune) in some way or another.⁸⁰

PHKH has another type of eating and drinking scene which is not found in *LHTS*. In scenes where persons share or refuse to share cups with each other class differences and prejudices are revealed between Tibetans in the village. Persons from certain groups or type of families related to some professions are traditionally associated with ideas of

⁷⁴ See *LHTS* 90–95.

⁷⁵ *LHTS* 476–478. Also earlier in life, when he had had *chang* for the first time, it had caused him trouble; see *LHTS* 77.

⁷⁶ See *LHTS*: 77–83. For information on how Tibetan culture was suppressed and cultural and religious objects destroyed during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), see Smith 1996/1997: 541–546.

⁷⁷ *rtsam pa* is flour made from roasted barley grains and is traditionally a staple food of Tibetans. For information on cultivation of barley in Tibetan areas, its history and cultural significance, see Laurent 2015.

⁷⁸ *PHKH* 325–330.

⁷⁹ *PHKH* 354.

⁸⁰ See Yeh (2013: 88) for a report of village life in Kyichuling during the commune period, which was characterized by “too much labor and not enough food”.

uncleanliness (*grib*) in Tibetan society. One of these groups are blacksmiths and persons coming from a family background of smiths.⁸¹ In *PHKH* this problem touches Tsheten Lhamo's family since her sister Drolma falls in love with Lhagdor, who is from a family background of smiths. There are scenes where either Tsheten Lhamo warns Drolma how a relation with someone from such a background may cause her problems so that even other people would not share cups with her, and then scenes in which Drolma's family members may even avoid sharing a cup with her. In the continuation of the scene where Tsheten Lhamo makes *bag thug* with her father, there is a description of the family members enjoying it together and then her younger sister Drolma also joins their company to eat. Something then happens between Tsheten Lhamo and Drolma:

Drolma took unconsciously Tsheten Lhamo's tea bowl which had been placed on top of the table and while she was intending to drink tea, Tsheten Lhamo (acting) almost as if a poisonous snake was about to bite her bowl, was shocked and said: "Eee, if you have to drink tea, I can wash another cup for you" and before she had finished saying it she took the bowl from her hand.⁸²

When her behaviour causes comments from Drolma's mother, Tsheten Lhamo gives the excuse that she was worried that her cold might be transmitted to Drolma and therefore she wishes to give her a different cup. This fictional scene appears to have some connection to the real life situation how beliefs about uncleanliness may influence people's social relations and behaviour. Heidi Fjeld has done research on classes of society which in Tibet were traditionally considered to be unclean on account of their low social status. Even in contemporary Tibetan society sharing tea cups with persons from low family backgrounds and drinking beer (*chang*) in the company of such people can still be associated with pollution.⁸³ As Fjeld reports, although Tibetan society and its divisions have undergone changes under Communist rule, traditional beliefs connected with various social classes still may affect people's ways of thinking.⁸⁴ In Tashi Palden's novel, through eating situations the difficult issue of inequality in the treatment of people becomes apparent. Here even though Drolma is from her own family, because Tsheten Lhamo thinks that she has some contact with a man from a family of smiths, Lhagdor, she appears to think that this pollution has somehow also spread to her sister and so does not wish to drink from the same cup. This leads to an argument between the family members which goes on to such an extent that people quit the house leaving Tsheten Lhamo and her father there only. This passage reveals a side in Tsheten Lhamo's character: she is prejudiced and influenced by old beliefs about the

⁸¹ For information on the social status of blacksmiths in traditional Tibetan society, see Kapstein 2006: 182–183. See also Fjeld 2008: 113, 116–117. In her article Heidi Fjeld observes how these beliefs about uncleanliness associated with some groups in Tibetan society still influence the relations between people.

⁸² *PHKH* 214: *sgrol mas snang med kyi sgo nas cog tse'i steng du bzhang pa'i tshes brtan lha mo'i ja phor tshur blangs nas ja 'thung rtis byed skabs tshes brtan lha mo ni ha lam dug sbrul gyis rang gi phor par kha rgyag grabs yod pa ltar 'dregs nas "e e/ rang ja 'thung dgos yod na ngas dkar yol gzhan zhig bkrus chog" ces skad cha bshad ma tshar gong mo'i lag pa nas phor pa tshur blangs/*

⁸³ Fjeld 2008: 113, 123–124.

⁸⁴ Fjeld 2005: 47–52.

uncleanliness of persons of a class of people traditionally regarded as having a low social status. In this and some other scenes in the novel the inequality of people belonging or associated with smiths is discussed, making the somewhat abstract idea of socially low status very concrete describing it in connection with the difficulties and restrictions which may arise in social eating and drinking situations.

Such scenes in which people avoid sharing cups with Drolma or Lhagdor,⁸⁵ add to the thematic functions of their characters. Through these characters and the attitudes they encounter the existence of discrimination based on traditional beliefs in Tibetan society is thematized in a socially critical light. Even though in the novel Lhagdor is generally depicted in quite an unfavourable light as his behaviour is sometimes rough and even violent, however, the reader is likely to sympathize with his sadness about unequal treatment and yearning thoughts for true social equality.⁸⁶ Lhagdor meets a tragic end: he is carried away by flood water when he takes a risk and tries to save a bridge. His body is not found, but other characters presume he must have died in the accident. However, afterwards some rumours spread that his spirit has been seen at night and thus the novel also depicts the existence of some superstitious beliefs among people in the village.⁸⁷

To sum up, in Tashi Palden's *PHKH* the scenes which include depictions of characters making food or drink are sometimes rather detailed. These descriptions are very realistic, giving the impression of careful observation of life in the countryside, but beyond mere description this novel can be interpreted to have a socially critical aspect. Some eating or drinking scenes, for instance, reveal the existence of discrimination and beliefs of uncleanliness connected with persons from a family background of blacksmiths or persons closely associated with such people. In this way literature offers a channel to discuss difficult social issues and problems of discrimination with the help of fictional characters. In *PHKH* there is less concentration on the narrative progression, and events may seem to evolve at their own pace. In Tagbum Gyal's *LHTS* there are also scenes in which food is prepared but its preparation or eating are not described in such great detail, although some scenes are more detailed than others. Preparing and enjoying food and drink are usually something which happens in the background when some character visits another as a gesture of hospitality; however, the main attention is usually given to the conversation which takes place between the characters. Thus, in this novel there is more emphasis on the development of personal relationships between characters and less emphasis is given to the details of the situations in which the interactions between characters take place. However, although there is some difference in detail and the amount of attention given to such routines related to food and drink, both these works have scenes which give some realistic idea of the diet of Tibetans in those regions and the way in which people prepare, enjoy food and drink, and socialize with each other.

4. Ordinary or Exemplary Characters?

When considering the question whether the characters in these two novels are "ordinary" Tibetans, there are different ways of approaching it. In some sense, in both

⁸⁵ *PHKH*: 249, 416.

⁸⁶ *PHKH*: 252–253, 416–417.

⁸⁷ *PHKH*: 428–433.

novels the characters can be considered quite ordinary fictional persons in the sense they are not highly appreciated lamas, eccentric yogis or royal personages, who were often the main personages in earlier Tibetan literature. In both novels the characters have occupations or are engaged in ordinary or everyday work. However, there are differences in their “level of ordinariness”, and in one sense in Tagbum Gyal’s *LHTS* the two main characters are depicted so, that they do not appear as “average” persons in their community but instead as quite special individuals.

In Tashi Palden’s *PHKH* Tsheten Lhamo is depicted as a quite ordinary village woman who has a lot of good qualities, such as being a hard-working person and a faithful wife. However, as I discussed above, there is also a quality present in her which is not so good: she does not appear to be very open-minded but is sometimes prejudiced and lacks some sense of equality between people from various backgrounds. She is not an exemplary character in an idealized sense, but her character could be regarded as a realistic depiction of a Tibetan peasant woman. She does not, for example, resemble a socialist realist heroine. The characters in socialist realist writings tended to be typically depicted in a somewhat black and white style, some depicted in a very positive light and some others in a negative way.⁸⁸ However, Tsheten Lhamo could also be considered a representative character of Tibetan women in the countryside in the times the novel is set in since both of her good qualities and the less positive ones such as her prejudicious and discriminative attitude towards persons whose family backgrounds were traditionally regarded as low could have been qualities shared by many Tibetan village women. Being a peasant and thus being a part of the masses of people in the countryside and possessing both positive and negative traits she could be considered to have some resemblance with a character type which has been called a “middle character”. Joe C. Huang has discussed these kinds of characters in Chinese fiction who in *Heroes and Villains in Communist China* he calls “men in the middle”, telling how the theory of middle characters was introduced by Shao Quanlin in the 1960s. He writes: “Shao defines men in the middle as those people with the capacity for progress, as well as backward traits.”⁸⁹ He also points out that Shao had described some middle characters as possessing “‘something of the past’, the so-called ‘spiritual burdens of individual peasants through the centuries’”.⁹⁰ This “spiritual burden” could well be applied to Tsheten Lhamo’s prejudicious and even superstitious attitude towards pollution (*grib*) associated traditionally with certain traditionally low class family backgrounds. The character of Tsheten Lhamo grows during the story time as the narrator tells how she becomes a mature woman who is direct in her speech and works with self-confidence.⁹¹ However, her prejudicious attitude influenced by old beliefs does not appear to change significantly.

⁸⁸ For information on socialist realism in China and heroes in this style of writing, see Herdan 1992: 95–97; and Huang 1973: 262–265, 292–294. Mathewson has used the expression “positive heroes” for heroes in Soviet literature (1958/1975: 2–3). He discusses a character called Pavel Korchagin, the hero of Ostrovsky’s *The Making of a Hero* and writes that, “Korchagin’s personal moral code is indistinguishable from the Party program” and also observes that “his actions are always successful” (Mathewson 1958/1975: 247–248).

⁸⁹ Huang 1973: 271. This theory later came under criticism, but as observed by Huang, middle characters can be found in novels written after that time (1973: 267, 284).

⁹⁰ Huang 1973: 269.

⁹¹ *PHKH*: 327–328.

Tsering Shakya has characterized the characters in this novel as typifying average persons.⁹² This could at least be true if we consider Tsheten Lhamo, who appears to be described as a quite ordinary but good Tibetan village woman who is illiterate, as many women were in those times the novel is located in. However, her sister Drolma has a very different personality – she appears open-minded, but not specially skilled in work or other tasks, even though she, too, is a member of an “ordinary” family. Thus, there are significant differences in the personalities of characters even though they might be “ordinary” villagers and the characterization is not monotonous: the characters have differing mimetic components. But Drolma, too, has to work in the fields, which contributes to the thematization of the work-filled life of Tibetan peasants. The heroine, Tsheten Lhamo and her family could be considered “ordinary” in the sense that they do not belong to any social class which earlier in traditional Tibetan society was regarded as especially high or low in social status. Their family is also not depicted as particularly poor or particularly well-off if compared to other families in the village. In Tibet under the Communist rule the traditional class divisions were abandoned and changed into new kinds of divisions,⁹³ although traditional divisions may still have influenced people’s ways of thinking.

Even though Tsheten Lhamo’s family are represented as “ordinary” (as indicated in the title of the novel), one needs to consider what might be meant by “ordinary” in the context of Tibetan villagers and their life approximately between the 1950s and 1980s. The author, Tashi Palden, has in an essay characterized Tsheten Lhamo and some other of his characters as “unprivileged characters” (*las skal dman pa'i mi sna*).⁹⁴ This expression gives an idea of people less fortunate in society. He describes such characters as marked by the signs of harsh life, being content with little, honest, well-behaved, and living courageously in a challenging natural environment.⁹⁵ He mentions how none of these kinds of characters are “fat” (*sha rgyags pa*). In the Tibetan cultural context saying that someone has “become fat” is often a politeness connected to commenting on someone’s apparent well-being. Telling how connected he still feels to his characters, he describes his way of feeling joy about rain, which is good for agriculture, and a reaction not typical of people living in urban surroundings.⁹⁶ His words convey the impression that his “unprivileged characters” typically live in the countryside and not in towns, where the life style is somewhat different. Tsheten Lhamo’s lack of school education and illiteracy could be one of the features which make her “unprivileged”, and this kind of situation of some persons failing to receive proper school education for one reason or another could have been quite common in the

⁹² Tsering Shakya 2004: 172.

⁹³ See Fjeld’s (2005: 34–36) discussion on the new social divisions in Tibet after the 1950s. Yeh (2013: 86) contains information on the new divisions of peasants introduced in 1960, the so-called “poor”, “middle peasants” and “representatives of feudal lords”. The last category of peasants were those who had had servants. Although I did not notice it explicitly mentioned in the novel, however, based on the descriptions of Tsheten Lhamo’s household, their fictional family could perhaps be characterized as “middle peasants” if considered from the viewpoint of the characteristics of these categories, since they had had some fields and livestock before collectivization, but had no servants.

⁹⁴ bKra shis dpal ldan 2006: 39.

⁹⁵ bKra shis dpal ldan 2006: 39–40.

⁹⁶ See bKra shis dpal ldan 2006: 39.

Tibetan countryside during the first decades of Communist rule in Tibet.⁹⁷ One of the main male characters, Lhagdor, too, could be considered “unprivileged” due to the discrimination he suffers from other villagers due to his blacksmith family background. This then affects Tsheten Lhamo’s sister Drolma, too, when she becomes his wife.

Another feature which makes Tsheten Lhamo “unprivileged” is connected to her being a half-orphan early in her childhood. Scholars have noted that often in Communist literature the main character is an orphan.⁹⁸ Shakya refers to Pollard’s views about “the parental role of the Party” and how this makes it possible to represent “the gratitude of the peasant”. In the Tibetan context Shakya interprets the representation of a protagonist being an orphan in the following way: “In the Tibetan context the depiction of an orphan serves as a metaphor for Tibet and the paternal civilising mission of the coloniser”.⁹⁹ Interestingly, in Tagbum Gyal’s novel *lHing ‘jags kyi rtswa thang*, the main male character, Wangden Dorje, is an orphan, too. Main characters who are orphaned appear to be quite common in modern Tibetan literature: also in two other well-known Tibetan novels from the 1980s and 1990s, namely in Peljor’s (dPal ‘byor) *gTsug g.yu* (“The Turquoise Head-Ornament”) and Dragdong Treling Wangdor’s (Brag gdong bKras gling dbang rdor) *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba’i gnam rgyud* (*The Secret History of Tesur House*) one of the main characters is orphaned at a young age.¹⁰⁰

If we first consider Tsheten Lhamo’s situation of being half-orphaned, it does not seem to be clearly connected with the above interpretation of orphans in Communist literature. The way she has to stay with a stepmother and the unequal treatment received by Tsheten Lhamo and Drolma, who are half-sisters, functions rather as one of the sources for disagreements in her family.¹⁰¹ Thus, her state of being a half-orphan is a feature of both the mimetic and thematic components of her character: it also functions thematically in structuring the progression which depicts the strifes and vicissitudes of her family. In her childhood Tsheten Lhamo has had to withstand unequal treatment from her stepmother, Chime Wangmo, who favours her own child Drolma. In one episode she is treated violently by her stepmother, receiving a wound on her head when Chime Wangmo hits her for not looking after the cows well enough. As a child Tsheten Lhamo had to spend so much time doing various kinds of tasks such as babysitting her smaller siblings and taking care of the cows, that she had little time for play. Also, when the family considers whether to send Drolma or Tsheten Lhamo to the newly opened village school, they choose Drolma since they need Tsheten Lhamo for various chores at home.¹⁰² Although Tsheten Lhamo’s childhood is difficult since she has to suffer unfair treatment and also has to do a lot of work, it appears that having undergone such difficulties also gives her character special strength – she is able to bear and overcome difficulties. The way in which Tsheten Lhamo is depicted at all stages of her life as busy

⁹⁷ Yeh (2013: 120) supplies the information that even after the economic reforms, the illiteracy rate in TAR remains high, characterizing it as “the highest in the country”.

⁹⁸ See Shakya 2004: 148 and Yangdon Dhondup 2004: 86.

⁹⁹ Shakya 2004: 148.

¹⁰⁰ See my recent article on characters in these two novels, Virtanen 2016.

¹⁰¹ There are various reasons for disagreements in Tsheten Lhamo’s family one major one being that her grandmother and her stepmother Chime Wangmo do not get along well and in one stage the family even divides into two households as it becomes too difficult to live together harmoniously, see *PHKH* 111–116.

¹⁰² *PHKH*: 63–67.

in various farm tasks and household chores, and does not receive a formal education, does not appear to be connected with the “civilising mission of the coloniser” – only the more fortunate village children are sent to school.¹⁰³ It does not appear that others take much care of her, and her educational needs are neglected due to her family situation.¹⁰⁴ She is an ordinary village woman who is illiterate through lack of formal education and her character has (in addition to her good qualities) the somewhat negative feature of being prejudiced towards people from a family background of smiths, who were traditionally considered lower in social status and associated with beliefs about pollution.¹⁰⁵ Thus her depiction appears to me to be a realistic style depiction of a Tibetan village woman whose life is filled with hard work both inside the house and out in the fields from morning to evening. The scenes in which she is engaged in performing some work or task gradually reveal how her character has this thematic component which contributes to the overall theme of the novel, the depiction of everyday peasant life in the countryside. In a way her position can be held as even weaker when compared to ordinary villagers due to her lack of education and the fact that she is a half-orphan. However, she manages well and this appears to reveal a special strength present in her personality. Telling about the life of characters who are less-privileged in society in some way or other, the author of the novel seems to stand on the side of these less fortunate people in society, showing the difficulties that arise from their situations. It is important to note that the members of an “ordinary” family are Tibetans: thus, it appears that the novel realistically represents ordinary Tibetans in the countryside and their everyday lives.

As mentioned above, Wangden Dorje, the main male protagonist of Tagbum Gyal’s *LHTS* is an orphan: he lost both his parents when he was still a small baby. Thus the condition of orphanhood is one feature which is shared with this character and typical heroes of Communist literature. However, his family background from the chiefs of g.Yang lung does not appear to be typical of heroes in Communist literature. It would be more typical for the hero to belong to ordinary or lower class people and not the former chiefs of a certain area.¹⁰⁶ He has also earlier suffered criticism about his

¹⁰³ Fjeld (2005: 36) comments in her study that there were special educational opportunities for children of lower class families in Lhasa in the years between 1959 and the 1970s and some were even sent for higher education to China.

¹⁰⁴ In her dissertation Yangdon Dhondup discusses the views of Lan Yang on model socialist orphan heroes. According to Lan Yang, the orphan heroes “are free from service to parents, so that they can completely dedicate themselves to the interests of the collective” and they also receive special care from others (Quoted in Yangdon Dhondup 2004: 86). This does not apply to Tsheten Lhamo, who has to work a lot for her family and their household already at a young age and is a rather neglected child who does not receive the kind of motherly love her half-sister does.

¹⁰⁵ The prejudices and the traditional beliefs associated with persons from a traditionally low social category may still influence the thinking of people as has been shown by Heidi Fjeld even though such social divisions were officially abandoned by Communists who introduced different social divisions (Fjeld 2005: 34–36, 47–52).

¹⁰⁶ In her dissertation Yangdon Dhondup explains how in Jampel Gyatso’s (‘Jam dpal mGya mtsho) novel *bsKal bzang me tog* the main protagonist Pempa has a typical family background of a hero in Communist literature: he comes from a family background of serfs. Pempa is also an orphan. To draw comparisons of these attributes of Pempa to the qualities of a hero in Communist literature, Yangdon Dhondup refers to the views presented by T.A. Hsia and Lan Yang (Yangdon Dhondup 2004: 86). Hladikova (2013: 112) has observed how in the early 1980s the main

behaviour and family background during the Cultural Revolution.¹⁰⁷ He has not, however, remained without care, but has been taken care of by his stepmother Ane Cag, who is also related to the family of the chiefs of g.Yang lung. The higher class family background makes Wangden Dorje different from typical heroes of socialist realism.

If we consider the occupations of the main characters in Tagbum Gyal's *LHTS*, they can be considered to be young people working for development and progress in their society. Wangden Dorje is the first person to open up a shop in his native village and Drolma Karmo is a properly educated teacher devoted to teaching the village children basic educational skills. Their professions as shopkeeper and teacher are part of both their mimetic and thematic components as they help to form the idea of them as individual persons and also contribute thematically to the theme of the development and modernization taking place in a countryside village. There appears to be some kind of exemplary quality present in the two main characters. Robin has described this novel as having been written in a socialist realist style.¹⁰⁸ Although there are some socialist realist features in the style of the novel, the fact that Wangden Dorje is a private shopholder is different from typical earlier socialist realist heroes. Business is often more linked with capitalist ideas rather than communism. However, it accords with the more liberalized economic policies of his time in the PRC and thus he can be considered to have some quality of a model character, albeit an updated model corresponding to the social trends of the times – a model character working for economic and material development and prosperity. Some features connected with model characters are visible, for example, in some qualities related to the main characters, especially their progressiveness and (but not always) their exemplary goodness. Also, the orphanhood of the hero could be viewed as a feature connected to socialist realist style of characterization, although the former high social status of Wangden Dorje's family does not seem to accord with the characteristics of typical heroes in Communist literature. Wangden Dorje is not always successful, which sets him aside from the idea of "positive heroes". For one thing, the fact that he cannot realize his wish to marry Drolma Karmo causes him great suffering. The characterization in this novel with some special features appears more nuanced than mere socialist realist types. However, carrying a strong thematic component of modernization in several areas, including values, the characters can be considered to be representative characters. When we think about progressive and exemplary features, representing a character as a "model" is not necessarily realistic and natural, but could be regarded as to some extent artificial, especially if the characters are unbelievably good. However, it is difficult to estimate whether model-like characters are realistic or not, as of course in real life too exemplariness can take many forms. Moreover, as Richardson points out, there can be distortions of characterization due to different worldviews, and the influence of ideology might result in stereotypical characters.¹⁰⁹ If the influence of ideology is too apparent in the construction of a character, then this might foreground the synthetic component and distort the realism of the depiction. When discussing characters written in areas under the People's Republic of China, it is important to try to distinguish what

characters of Tibetan literature tended to be of low origin and she points out the influence of Chinese "mass literature".

¹⁰⁷ See *LHTS*: 76–80.

¹⁰⁸ Robin 2009/2010: 35.

¹⁰⁹ Herman et al. 2012: 132.

might be considered realistic depiction and what is ideologically coloured. This is challenging and sometimes perhaps impossible as both features may be combined in a character, but it is good in any case to be aware of the possible presence of some ideological colouring.

In her inner calling to work as a teacher in a pastoralist area, Drolma Karmo resembles Drugtso ('Brug mtsho), a heroine in Dhondup Gyal's short story "Brug mtsho".¹¹⁰ However, Tagbum Gyal's female character is very tragic if compared to Drugtso, who is even called "dPa' mo", "heroine" and is a highly successful teacher in a village called gSer lung in a pastoralist area in Amdo.¹¹¹ In Tagbum Gyal's novel Drolma Karmo escapes her arranged marriage to a nuns' hermitage in the mountains, where she dies while giving birth to her and Wangdor's daughter. These events are only known to Wangdor later, when an elderly nun brings their child to him, as narrated in a flashback in the last chapter, the "Afterword" ("mJug gi gtam"). Although the nuns had called a Chinese female ex-doctor to help, it can be understood (even if not directly pointed out in the novel) that to give birth in a remote hermitage involves risks since the modern facilities of hospitals are not likely to be available there.¹¹² Although her escape shows rebellion against the tradition of arranged marriages, escaping to a nuns' hermitage includes a traditional element, too, as nuns and Buddhist religion are strongly connected to traditional Tibetan culture. This escape to a nunnery resembles Dhondup Gyal's novella "Sad kyiis bcom pa'i me tog" ("A Flower Destroyed by Frost"), in which its main female character Lhakyi (Lha skyid) escapes an arranged marriage and stays with an elderly nun.¹¹³ If we ask how *LHTS* differs from Dhondup Gyal's works, one answer is that it is a much longer, carefully structured prosework which manages to capture several aspects of Tibetan life in a remote pastoralist village. Dhondup Gyal's completed prose works were typically short stories and novellas.

There is something of a model character present in Drolma Karmo when her devotion to educational work in a pastoralist area is considered. However, this model-like quality again accords with the modernization policies in the PRC from the 1980s onwards. Thus, she is not a heroine engaged in physical labour, but is involved in educational work, teaching the children of her area. She is an excellent teacher and her class obtains the best results in the county in the third grade exams.¹¹⁴ In the novel, some of the characters express ideas which do not seem to appreciate the teacher's work in a village school very highly, or give more value to administrative work.¹¹⁵ The problems related to a teacher's work in a small village in a pastoralist area are described in a couple of places in the novel. For example, some parents do not value school education very highly, but might take their children out of school, and the school has a lack of resources.¹¹⁶ However, Drolma Karmo's dedication to teaching is shown by the fact, that she is not interested in the town or an administrative career, but wishes to teach her young pupils in a small village in a pastoralist area. When she hears that she

¹¹⁰ Don grub rgyal 1997 (2): 302–317.

¹¹¹ Dhondup Gyal's "Brug mtsho" can be found in his *Collected Works*, vol 2: 302–317 (Don grub rgyal 1997).

¹¹² See *LHTS*: 564–565.

¹¹³ This novella can also be found in Dhondup Gyal's *Collected Works*, vol. 2: 218–288.

¹¹⁴ See *LHTS*: 420.

¹¹⁵ See e.g. *LHTS*: 18, 20.

¹¹⁶ *LHTS*: 20, 105–108.

has to move to town due to her transfer, she cries and does not want to go, even though she then has to go according to the decision which has been made without asking her opinion.¹¹⁷

The character of Wangden Dorje has some exemplary features (in addition to his progressiveness in opening a shop). For example, he makes a donation to the school, takes interest in developing agriculture and then, after understanding how cultivation of the grasslands causes damage to the environment, he decides to develop pastoralist work and even at the end travels abroad with a group of villagers to learn new methods of pastoralist work. I cannot help but feel that this way of concluding the novel with a “Tibetan peoples’ tour group”¹¹⁸ flying abroad to learn about modern trends of pastoralist work has some flavour of socialist realism, however, there is evidently also a strong influence of ideas of modernization from the 1980s onwards. Wangden Dorje’s establishing a shop is a kind of pioneering work in the village and can be considered development in an economic sense, although he is not also completely exemplary as he sometimes turns to the bottle. Tibetan critic Namse has discussed this novel in his essay and refers to the characters as “typical or representative characters” (*tshab mtshon mi sna*), writing that they are used to represent “the changes of the era and the life in a society which is turbulent” and also “the courage to hold on with a pure mind to love”.¹¹⁹ The idea that characters represent larger issues in society is one of the qualities usually associated with typical characters. The main characters in *LHTS* could be considered as not so “ordinary”, but rather as quite exemplary individuals in their community, so they could be viewed as model-like ordinary people. However, there are also some features present in Wangden Dorje which are different from typical socialist realist characterization. Overall, the main characters can be considered exemplary characters but in the style of their times and society. The idea of the typical character also seems to have developed in Tibetan critical discussion from socialist realist types to a wider sense of a representative character.¹²⁰

However, *LHTS* includes representations of some ordinary people, too. These are the villagers who live in the village where Drolma Karmo and Wangden Dorje are staying. Their tasks and qualities appear to resemble to some extent those of the peasants in Tashi Palden’s novel. In *LHTS*, too, the villagers take care of sheep, a woman character does not have any school education, and parents are depicted as taking their children out of the village school to work at home. They could perhaps be considered to resemble Shao Quanlin’s earlier mentioned idea of “middle characters”, which in addition to positive traits also had negative traits. The difference in characterization between the two novels is that in Tashi Palden’s novel the main character is one of the ordinary villagers who is not depicted as special (but is instead depicted as weakened or underprivileged due to some conditions), but in Tagbum Gyal’s novel the main

¹¹⁷ See *LHTS*: 418–421.

¹¹⁸ The expression used to refer to the group in the novel in Tibetan is *bod rigs dmangs khrod kyi lta skor tshogs pa* (*LHTS*: 586).

¹¹⁹ rNam sras 2006: 508. The quoted expressions in Tibetan are *dus rabs kyi 'gyur ldog dang lthing 'jags min pa'i spyi tshogs kyi 'tsho ba* and *brtse dung la lhag bsam rnam dag 'dzin pa'i bla na med pa'i sems shugs*.

¹²⁰ For Tibetan critics’ views on typical or representative characters, see Tsho bzhi shes rab lhun grub 2007, Nyi chung & bKra shis bu lags 2004, Klu thar rgyal 2008: 188–199, Bu bzhi 2007: 260–264.

characters are persons who bring education and material development, and introduce new agricultural and pastoralist ideas to the village. However, the main characters in *LHTS* experience great suffering in their own personal life, failing to realize their wish to stay together, and Drolma Karmo dies tragically in childbirth. In Tashi Palden's novel the characters have to adjust to the changes introduced in ways of producing livelihood, but in Tagbum Gyal's novel they are more active agents of change, taking initiative and working for the development of the village. However, notably, in both novels the main characters and most of the other characters, too, are Tibetans, thus in both novels the characters may be viewed as representing Tibetans and the realistic depictions of their life and problems connected with it in villages in the countryside.

5. Conclusion

To sum up the discussion above, both novels contain scenes which include representations of the everyday life of Tibetan people in small villages. In Tashi Palden's *PHKH* these scenes are often related to the agro-pastoralist lifestyle of the villagers and the characters are involved in tasks such as agricultural work, herding and taking care of the cattle, and also tasks related to taking care of the household. The heroine of the novel, Tsheten Lhamo is depicted both doing work in the fields and doing various household chores. Often the depiction of characters engaged in their work is rather detailed and attention is given to the process of performing tasks.

In Tagbum Gyal's *LHTS* the professions of the main characters differ from most of the villagers. Its heroine, Drolma Karmo, is a trained and qualified teacher and its hero, Wangden Dorje, a shopkeeper. The novel also represents villagers of g.Yang lung involved in some aspects of a pastoralist life style, for example, characters who herd sheep and an elderly person who wishes to continue to live in a tent, however, these are side characters rather than main characters. Later in the novel the hero, Wangden Dorje, is also depicted as taking an interest in the development of agriculture and pastoralist work.

Using Phelan's theoretical concepts of the three components of characters provided helpful tools for discussing different aspects of the characters. Of these three components, the synthetic components of characters remain in the background in these two novels, which are written for the most part in a realistic style. As fictional characters they have a synthetic component, being writers imaginative constructs; however, the synthetic component is not foregrounded and the characters appear as "natural" persons in both novels. Having said that, it is difficult to tell whether there might also be some ideological colouring mixed into the character construction, especially when some characters are depicted to some degree as model-like persons acting in a way that appears to be in harmony with the party policies of the time of writing (such as the main hero and heroine in *LHTS*). Overall, the characters are plausible persons in both novels – one could imagine such persons in real life.

In both novels the mimetic components of characters are well developed, which also contributes towards the realistic impression. When discussing the rich mimetic details of characters performing various tasks in Tashi Palden's novel, it was noted how the mimetic detail of work situations is gradually converted into a thematic function. The work scenes contribute to thematic components of characters, who become understood as persons whose lives are filled with work and other household chores – i.e. a representation of ordinary Tibetan peasants and their life. Thus, the way in which

characters are depicted in the middle of their everyday tasks contributes towards thematization in the novel: one important theme of the novel is the depiction of Tibetan everyday life in the countryside, which is depicted as life usually filled with work from morning to night.

In the two novels both the mimetic and thematic components of characters are developed, although their mode of development appears to differ. In Tagbum Gyal's novel the thematic component is developed in a clearer manner from the beginning, and the thematic component of the main characters is more emphasized. Although there are scenes in which some of the main characters' activities related to their work are depicted, these, however, appear to function more as a background and context for the development of the relation between the main characters. Thus, the novel has a more social focus on the relations between characters. However, their professions lend the characters of Wangdor and Drolma Karmo a flavour of progressiveness, as they both work in fields which contribute to the development of the village, namely trade and education.

Both novels can be interpreted as having the thematic elements of love and of the everyday life of Tibetans in a specific rural area. But these thematic elements receive different emphases: in Tagbum Gyal's novel the theme of romantic love is more in focus, whereas the depictions of everyday life receive less attention. Often the everyday life in the village in a pastoralist area in this novel is represented through side characters. Thus, in Tagbum Gyal's novel in scenes related to everyday-life depictions of characters in their tasks of various kinds, the focus is more on human relationships and their development, whereas in Tashi Palden's novel there is more detail in and emphasis on the actual description of everyday tasks and responsibilities of the characters, and human relationships evolve slowly through the progression between characters connected to Tsheten Lhamo's family. In Tashi Palden's novel the focus is more on the development of the mimetic component of characters which, however, through accumulation of depictions of characters in various kinds of work are gradually converted into thematic functions and contribute towards thematization. Thus, there is a stronger focus on activities related to work in this novel. Work arises as an important constituent of the life of the peasants – it is the means of food production and of survival. However, the working situations also provide the characters with opportunities to communicate with each other, and can reveal some personality and other traits of a character such as, for example, Tsheten Lhamo being a diligent, hard-working and responsible person.

As we saw, both novels contain scenes in which food or drink are prepared and/or enjoyed. Tashi Palden's novel contains quite detailed description of food preparation, eating and drinking. In Tagbum Gyal's novel, there are also scenes in which food is cooked or enjoyed, although these scenes are more focused on social aspects: human communication and the development of human relationships. In Tashi Palden's novel the food and drink situation of the villagers also reflects the economic situation of the village in different times: in some periods there is sufficient food and even nice food for special occasions, such as festivals and celebrations, but at other times the food situation is worse, some families even suffering from poverty and insufficient food for their needs. In Tashi Palden's novel scenes involving depictions of eating or drinking are sometimes used as occasions to bring to light social problems. They may be used to illustrate how conceptions of pollution associated with certain classes of people

traditionally regarded as lower class, may still influence people's behaviour towards them. Thus everyday situations of eating and drinking are in some scenes in this novel also used as occasions to concretely illustrate social problems of discrimination and how old beliefs still influence people's behaviour.

Both novels are written in a style which is predominantly realistic – representing realistically Tibetan life in the countryside. Although the characters in both novels can be described as “ordinary” Tibetans, their ordinariness has different levels. In Tashi Palden's novel the villagers can be viewed as ordinary villagers, some of them having a weaker position than others either due to their family situation or due to beliefs connected with a background which is traditionally regarded as lower class in Tibetan society. The central character is Tsheten Lhamo, but the novel is less focused on her inner growth as an individual but more emphasis is placed on the depiction of the life of her family and people connected with it. She can be considered an ordinary Tibetan peasant woman, but in accordance with the views on less privileged characters presented by the author, Tashi Palden, her position appears weaker if compared to some others. She is a half-orphan and has to suffer from some discrimination between siblings from her stepmother and she does not have the privilege of receiving formal education in the village school unlike some other children. Also her mind is influenced by traditional beliefs about pollution associated with certain groups of people. Thus, she cannot be considered “progressive” or “exemplary”, but is just a normal village woman who holds to some conservative and superstitious beliefs. She can be thought of as a representative character of Tibetan peasant women of her time.

In Tagbum Gyal's novel the main characters had professions which can be considered progressive in the social context of a remote village in the countryside and can be viewed as having some features of model characters. However, they also have some qualities which were not typical, such as Wangdor's descent from the former chiefs of g.Yang lung. The activities of these characters connected to their work also reveal some traits of their personalities: their interest in development and education and working for the betterment of the life of people in their community which accords with the political ideas of modernization present in the society in their time. The novel has also characters who are ordinary villagers, but these are side characters. If we compare the characters to the idea of Shao Quanlin's “middle character”, the characters in Tashi Palden's novel could be seen to resemble to some extent this idea, and some of them are even in a weaker position than average persons in the village, whereas in Tagbum Gyal's novel the ordinary villagers in g.Yang lung could be viewed as “men in the middle”, representatives of the masses. The hero and heroine, however, are depicted as more exemplary individuals and as progressive persons working for the development of their community.

All in all it can be said that the novels are monumental works of Tibetan literature realistically depicting the everyday life and problems of Tibetan people in small villages at the time the novels are set. Before their publication, Tibetan novels had appeared in which a socialist realist style had influenced the depiction of problems and strife between social classes, such as Peljor's novel located in Tibet before the 1950s. Also if compared to some works of Tibetan literature, such as Tashi Dawa's stories (originally in Chinese) written in a magical realist style, the choice of Tashi Palden and Tagbum Gyal to write their novels in a realist style is remarkable. There is neither mystery nor

miraculous happenings in these novels.¹²¹ The writers have often concentrated on depicting the normal activities of their characters in their usual everyday environments. Due to the modernization and development taking place, everyday life in Tibet and Tibetan areas was undergoing changes. Thus, the depiction of the normal life of people at certain periods of time will give readers a vivid picture of Tibetan life during those times.

References

- bKra shis dpal ldan 1991. *Phyi nyin gyi gnam gshis de ring las legs pa yong nges* ("The Weather Will Be Better Tomorrow than Today"). Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang.
- PHKH: bKra shis dpal ldan 1992/2006. *Phal pa'i khyim tshang gi skyid sdug* ("The Life of an Ordinary Family"). Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang. (2nd edition).
- bKra shis dpal ldan 1999. *rGyud skud steng gi rnam shes* ("Consciousness on Lute Strings"). Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang.
- bKra shis dpal ldan 2006. "bDag dang bdag gi las skal dman pa'i mi sna dang skad yig" ("I and My Unprivileged Characters and Language"). In mTsho sngon bod yig gsar 'gyur khang (ed.), *Nags klong khu byug 'du gnas* ("The Forest Abode of Cuckoos"), 37–44.
- Bu bzhi bsam pa'i don grub 2007. *rTsom rig gzhung lugs* ("Theory of Literature"). Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang.
- Cabezón, José Ignacio & Roger R. Jackson (eds.) 1996. *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*. Ithaca: Snow Lion.
- Cheung Yin Ki 2012. *Iconography of "New China": Imagery of Labor Models, 1936-1965*. Ph.D. thesis Humanities. Hong Kong: The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. HKUST Electronic Theses (link: <http://lbezone.ust.hk/bib/b1190516#>, Accessed January 2, 2017).
- Cohn, Dorrit 1999/2006. *Fiktion mieli. (The Distinction of Fiction)*. Translated into Finnish by Paula Korhonen, Markku Lehtimäki, Kai Mikkonen ja Sanna Palomäki. Helsinki: Gaudeamus.
- Don grub rgyal 1997. *dPal don grub rgyal gyi gsung 'bum* ("The Collected Works of Don grub rgyal"). Vol. 2: *brTsams sgrung phyogs bsgrigs* ("the Collection of Stories"). Eds. Ban kho & bKra rgyal. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang.
- Eagleton, Terry & Drew Milne (eds.) 1996. *Marxist Literary Theory: A Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Erhard, Franz Xaver 2007. "Magical Realism and Tibetan Literature". In Venturino, Steven J. (ed.), *Contemporary Tibetan Literary Studies*. Leiden: Brill, 133–146.
- Erhard, Franz Xaver 2011. "Constructed identities and contemporary Tibetan literature: The fiction of the A mdo ba Skyabs chen bde grol and the Lha sa ba Dpal 'byor". In Gray Tuttle (ed.), *Mapping the Modern in Tibet. PIATS 2006: Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the Eleventh Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Königswinter 2006*. Andiast: IITBS, 419–434.
- Fjeld, Heidi 2005. *Commoners and Nobles: Hereditary Divisions in Tibet*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.
- Fjeld, Heidi 2008. "Pollution and Social Networks in Contemporary Rural Tibet". In Robert Barnett and Ronald Schwartz (eds.), *Tibetan Modernities: Notes from the Field on Cultural and Social Change, PIATS 2003: Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the*

¹²¹ With the exception that in PHKH (432–441) the way in which superstitious rumours about Lhagdor's spirit after his death start to spread in the village and how Drolma thinks that she has seen his spirit is depicted. But these kinds of descriptions about superstitiousness among villagers can be viewed as being written realistically to convey an idea of the thinking and superstitiousness of some characters.

- International Association for Tibetan Studies, Oxford, 2003*. (Brill's Tibetan Studies Library vol. 10/11). Leiden: Brill, 113–137.
- Grünfelder, Alice 1999. *Tashi Dawa und die neuere tibetische Literatur*. Bochum: Projekt Verlag.
- Hartley, Luran R. & Patricia Schiaffini-Vedani (eds.) 2008. *Modern Tibetan Literature and Social Change*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Herman, David, James Phelan, Peter J. Rabinowitz, Brian Richardson, Robyn Warhol. 2012. *Narrative Theory: Core Concepts and Critical Debates*. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press.
- Hladikova, Kamila 2013. *The Exotic Other and Negotiation of Tibetan Self: Representation of Tibet in Chinese and Tibetan fictions of the 1980s*. Palacky University, Olomouc.
- Hong, Zicheng 1999/2009. *A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature*. Translated by Michael M. Day. Leiden: Brill.
- Hor gtsang klu rgyal (ed.) 2012. *Deng rabs bod kyi rtsom pa po'i lo rgyus dang brtsams chos dkar chag* ("The Catalogue of the Lifestories and Writings of Tibetan Contemporary Writers"). Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang.
- Huang, Joe C. 1973. *Heroes and Villains in Communist China: The Contemporary Chinese Novel as a Reflection of Life*. London: C. Hurst & Company.
- Kapstein, Matthew T. 2006. *The Tibetans*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Klu thar rgyal 2008. *rTsom gzhung spyi bshad* ("General Explanation of the Theory of Literature"). Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang.
- Laurent, Yannick 2015. "Tibetans in the Making: Barley Cultivation & Cultural Representations". *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* no.33, October 2015: 73–108.
- Moon, A. A. 1991. "Modern Tibetan Fiction", Part 1, *Tibetan Review*, October 1991: 19–25; Part 2, *Tibetan Review*, November 1991: 15–20 and Part 3, *Tibetan Review*, December 1991: 13–17.
- Mathewson, Rufus W., Jr. 1958/1975. *The Positive Hero in Russian Literature*. Stanford: Stanford University Press (2nd edition).
- Nyi chung & bKra shis bu lags 2004. "rTsom rig gi gzhung lugs nas drangs te tshab mtshon mi sna'i gsar bzhangs byed stangs skor gleng ba" ("A Discussion on the Way How to Create Representative Characters Based on the Theory of Literature"), *Bod kyi rtsom rig sgyu rtsal* 5: 37–46.
- mTsho sngon bod yig gsar 'gyur khang (ed.) 2006. *Nags klong khu byug 'du gnas* ("The Forest Abode of Cuckoos"). Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang.
- Phelan, James 1989. *Reading People, Reading Plots: Character, Progression, and the Interpretation of Narrative*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- rMog Don grub tshe ring 2006. "Khu sim pa'i stag 'bum rgyal" ("Silent Tagbum Gyal"). In mTsho sngon bod yig gsar 'gyur khang (ed.), *Nags klong khu byug 'du gnas*, 493–498.
- rNam sras 2005. *Dus skabs gsar pa'i bod kyi sgrung gam la dpyad pa blo gsar dgyes pa'i dga' ston* ("Research on the Tibetan Prose of the New Era: The Festival Delighting the Youth"). Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang.
- rNam sras 2006. "Tshab byed rang bshin ldan pa'i rtsom rig mi sna gsar ba dang kho'i brtsams chos" ("A New Representative Literary Personage and His Writings"). In mTsho sngon bod yig gsar 'gyur khang (ed.), *Nags klong khu byug 'du gnas*, 503–508.
- Robin, Françoise 2007. "Stories and History: The Emergence of Historical Fiction in Contemporary Tibet". In Venturino, Steven J. (ed.), *Contemporary Tibetan Literary Studies*. Leiden: Brill, 23–41.
- Robin, Françoise 2009/2010: "Tibetan Novels: Still a Novelty: A Brief Survey of Tibetan Novels Since 1985". *Latse: Trace Foundation's Latse Library Newsletter*, vol. 6, 2009–2010: 26–45.
- Robin, Françoise 2016. "Souls Gone in the Wind? Suspending Belief about Rebirth in Contemporary Artistic Works in the Tibetan World". *Himalaya*, Spring 2016, Vol. 36:1: 116–129.
- Schiaffini-Vedani, Patricia 2008. "The 'Condor' Flies over Tibet: Zhaxi Dawa and the Significance of Tibetan Magical Realism". In Hartley, Luran R. & Patricia Schiaffini-Vedani

- (eds.), *Modern Tibetan Literature and Social Change*. Durham: Duke University Press, 202–224.
- Shakya, Tsering 2000. “The Waterfall and Fragrant Flowers: The Development of Tibetan Literature since 1950”. In Stewart, Frank, Herbert J. Batt & Tsering Shakya (eds.), *Song of the Snow Lion*. Mānoa 12: 2. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 28–40.
- Shakya, Tsering W. 2004. The Emergence of Modern Tibetan Literature – *gsar rtsom*. PhD dissertation. University of London: School of Oriental and African Studies.
- Smith, Warren W. Jr. 1996/1997. *Tibetan Nation: A History of Tibetan Nationalism and Sino-Tibetan Relations*. New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India.
- LHTS: sTag 'bum rgyal 1999. *lHing 'jags kyi rtswa thang* (“The Silent Grassland”). Xining: mTsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang.
- sTag 'bum rgyal 2006. “Phyogs zhen gyi mnar gcod” (“The Wrath of Desire”). In mTsho sngon bod yig gsar 'gyur khang (ed.), *Nags klong khu byug 'du gnas*. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 490–492.
- Tsho bzhi shes rab lhun grub 2007. “rTsom rig gi snang brnyan las dpe mtshon mi sna'i khyad chos la cung zad dpyad pa” (“A Brief Discussion on the Characteristics of Typical Characters of Literary Representations”), *Bod kyi rtsom rig sgyu rtsal* 2: 17–20.
- Virtanen, Riika J. 2016. “Characters in Modern Tibetan Fiction Set in Pre-1950s Central Tibet: Aristocrats, Common Folk and Others”. In Franz Xavier Erhard, Jeannine Bischoff, Lewis Doney, Jörg Heimbels, & Emilia Sulek (eds.), *Ancient Currents, New Traditions: Papers Presented at the Fourth International Seminar of Young Tibetologists*. *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*. Nr. 37, Décembre 2016: 490–514.
- Yangdon Dhondup 2004. *Caught Between Margins: Culture, Identity and the Invention of a Literary Space in Tibet*. PhD Dissertation. University of London: School of Oriental and African Studies.
- Yeh, Emily T. 2013. *Taming Tibet: Landscape Transformation and the Gift of Chinese Development* [e-book]. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press; eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), EBSCOhost Accessed January 15, 2017.